

widget

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Featuring:
Medea on Parenting
Smaug's Investing Tips
Baba Yaga's Chicken Recipes
Not Really, But It *Is* Good Tho

Myths & Legends

Widget explores the world of myths and legends, in an effort to land the Mummy's first ever humour piece, "Grr, What If Ramses II Star In Romcom, Grr?"



Dead Henry, Editor in Chief

Mass Ted

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Some say the conservative ‘humour’ site ran something funny once, but no.

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Legend Of The Bird-brained Website

Legend has it that two unfunny Canadians decided to start a comedy website. And then, through a twist of fate, they got like \$30k simoleons from Grant for the Web. So, uh, I guess they better fucking cobble something together pretty fucking fast, huh?

Here at Widget, we've always been interested in myth – even since we were kids. In infancy, co-editor Sam Allemang became fascinated with the myth of the 'haunted diaper.' In truth, this was simply a nightmare he had had where his diaper tries to eat him (and the only way to defeat it was to feed it so much... – well, you can imagine – that it bursts). To this day, he always maintains a robust supply of... – well, you can imagine – just in case the 'haunted diaper' escapes from the world of dreams and into the world of the real world.

And for her part, co-editor Janet Mowat spent her first years fixated on a theory that Gerber baby formula was made entirely from the wayward souls of those caught between heaven and earth. These transient, restless undead were lured to the Gerber factory by the promise of 'ghost bucks,' according to the paranoid tot, only to be captured, processed and bottled. Unfortunately, Janet's Crayola drawings of ghosts living

in a baby's tummy were not enough to prompt a FDA investigation. Because she was right.

And so, approx. 40 years later, after several decades mostly spent drinking beer, watching hockey, and listening to Motown, Sam and Janet founded widgetmag.com to pursue our passion for myths & legends. For a month, at least.

In January 2021, Widget published 20 pieces that investigate the theme of myths & legends and bring many new and unsettling discoveries to light: Can ghosts rent an apartment? What's the return policy on a monkey's paw? And why won't your daughter shut up about moths? Our brilliant authors tackled these questions and so very many more in the following pages.

All this is made possible by Grant for the Web (grantfortheweb.org), by the way. For some mythically baffling reason, they entrusted us with ~\$30k US to pay contributors over the next 6 months.

Someone there musta drank deep from the Lethe after reading our application. Works 4 us!

I Don't Care Who You're The Ghost Of. I'm the Landlord Of This Property And You Need To Pay Me Rent



Kevin Tit (he/him) is a DC based comedian. He keeps himself busy between organizing PunkHouse Comedy, his monthly comedy / punk show, writing for The Hard Times, recording and producing the Up The Blunx Podcast, playing in various bands and creating sketch comedy with the Midnight Gardeners League. Kevin sez, "Check out the sketch comedy group The Midnight Gardeners League. Also check out Up The Blunx. The only podcast by black punks for black punks." W: thehardtimes.net/author/kevin-tit; @kevinTitF-real (tw); @notkevintit (ig)

Listen, I get it. Times are tough and the job market doesn't have much to offer at the moment. I'm sure it's especially tough to get a job when you're...well...dead. That doesn't change the fact that you've been occupying this property for way too long to not be paying me my rent. I don't care if you're the murdered spirit of some European monarch. That's not my problem. I need my money.

I assume it's you who's been leaving rotting corpses piled up in the living room as a form of currency. Do you really think I can accept this? I can't take maggot filled, rotting corpses of rats to the bank. I know because I've tried and they wouldn't even let me through the front door. I'm not even allowed to visit that branch anymore.

Aren't there some living relatives you can haunt into writing you a cheque or something? I'm not buying any of this "we weren't as rich as people think" crap anymore. Your family was responsible for 74% of all the wealth in Europe for a few centuries so there's no way in hell you're conveniently strapped for cash now. I mean, if you really are some sort of royal ghost.

Listen, I wouldn't be pressing you so hard on the issue if I could get some other tenants to move in here but that'll never happen as long as you're hanging around haunting people. It wasn't even a week after I installed the new kitchen cabinet set that they started leaking with blood. Plus, all the slamming of the doors. I've had to replace ALL OF THEM over six times at this point and don't even get me started on the moaning and groaning coming from the basement. You expect me to just pay for all this shit out of pocket? The least you

could do is put in a word with some dead presidents to haunt my bank account or something.

I mean I almost had a two year lease locked in with a nice couple until you had to scare these poor people with your incessant late night yelling and wall scratching. Is it some old european monarch tradition to traumatize innocent people by hovering old photographs of their deceased relatives around them while they're trying to eat dinner? I'm not trying to be insensitive to your undead culture but if you want to do all that stuff in here you're going to have to pay. I mean the least you can do is keep your antics to yourself up in the attic or somewhere away from other people.

Plus, you're lowering the property value of this house dramatically and it's to the point where I almost can't afford to keep this place. If I lose it, the bank is going to sell the lot to some developers who will end up demolishing it and building a hookah bar or something and I know neither of us want that.

I understand you might not care for me. Especially after the time I invited a priest over to get you out of here by performing an exorcism. Or that time I invited a voodoo priestess to cast you out using a sacrificial goat. I just don't really know what other options I have here. I really really don't want to have to get the authorities involved with this. Especially because they laughed me off the phone last time I called them about it. It's like, what do you mean haunting spirits are out of your jurisdiction? To add insult to injury, the number they gave me for the Ghostbusters wasn't even real. So, I'm begging you, I don't have any recourse here. Please just pay me the damn rent.



Do Not Stop Reading This Chain Email or Something Bad Will Happen!!!

Scarlet Meyer (she/her) is a NYC based writer, comedian, and cursed chain email apologist. She's contributed to Reductress, McSweeney's, and Points and Case and is a former Managing Editor at The Belladonna Comedy. Follow her on Twitter to catch every stray thought running through her head. Scarlet recommends, "Shameless plug, but check out Last Refuge pod! They're a sci fi/pop culture podcast that is super fun and I'm a guest on the Space Western and Space Marine themed episodes: lastrefugepod.com." w: scarletmeyer.com; @scarletkmeyer (tw)

HEY! I said don't stop reading!!!! Ok, phew. I just saw you glancing at the door like you had somewhere else to be. Which would be weird because this takes priority, you know?

That's right, I saw you because I'm here!!!! Pretty scary right??? (Don't look behind you to check, that would mean you would have to stop reading this email.)

My name is Matt and I'm an IT technician. 10 years ago I was cursed to teach people about the importance of reading their emails. All because I didn't finish reading this chain email.

A cool guy named Thaddeus that I was trying to get to know better saw this email and didn't read until the end. He laughed and deleted it which was a total Thaddeus move in retrospect. I warned him that if he didn't read the entire message, something awful would happen. Something so scary and frightening that once he opened the floodgates to this harrowing event, there was no going back. Alas, Thaddeus didn't heed my dire warning. Soon he started running into me around town. Slowly we started to become acquaintances. Eventually he made the mistake of saying hi.

Now whenever we see each other he

isn't sure whether to wave or stop and have a conversation. If he waves, he feels a little bad about it afterwards because I seem so lonely!! But if he stops and has a conversation with me, I make the most painfully boring small talk possible. I somehow manage to seem annoyed/disengaged, and yet I refuse to let the conversation have a natural conclusion. Absolute nightmare shit. Don't test me, Thaddeus!!!

If you don't forward this email to 20 of your closest friends and invite me to hang out you'll run into me when you're out running errands on and off FOREVER!!!! Mark my words!!!

NO SEND BACKS!!!!!! I've gotten a lot of those and it kind of makes me feel like no one is taking me seriously.

Do NOT stop reading or something horrendous will happen!!!! Please read this email to the very end OR ELSE!!!

A girl named Addison saw this message and ignored it. She was in study hall and thought chain emails weren't a "productive use of her time" (amateur)!! After school, Addison's boyfriend dumped her in the parking lot.

"I am breaking up with you!" said her boyfriend. "Also, magenta is not your colour!" Addison looked down at

her magenta sweater. “But I thought I was pulling this off!” cried Addison.

“No, not at all. Goodbye BADison!” Her ex-boyfriend walked away, laughing all the way home like a cartoon villain. Addison was hurt. Her name was not “BADison”. Why was he being such a dillhole? Could it be that she marked the chain message as spam?

Addison’s parents were waiting for her when she got home. They were very angry. Addison had gotten a B- instead of an A on her homework because she stopped reading this message!!! Addison’s mom was so distraught by her daughter’s failure she went total sicko mode, got purple streaks in her hair, and started listening to Rage Against the Machine!! Addison’s dad was so upset he joined a stamp collecting club and made it his main hobby for several years!! Soon every inch of their house was dedicated to his stamp collection and it really put a strain on the family dynamic!!!

(Though at least she still had a steady support system unlike some lonesome cursed IT technicians I could mention ADDISON!!)

If you do not forward this chain message with the title “A Very Terrifying Way to Break Up”, you will get dumped AND never be able to rock magenta ever again!!!! 14 people have broken this chain letter and don’t want to talk about it!!!

Addison and Thaddeus weren’t the only ones to ignore this chain email. Far from it! Do you know how many people actually read emails all the way through? Not enough. It makes me feel very alone and like others don’t respect me on a friendship level. I’m not bitter about it though, I just seek ELABORATE REVENGE!!!

A girl named Amber saw this email in 1995 but didn’t read it all the way through because her complimentary AOL CD ran out. But everyone had a ton of those laying around so that’s not really an excuse AMBER!!!

Later, Amber’s friends asked her if she knew all the words to the Spice Girls song, “Wannabe”. Amber did normally, but when they all started singing, Amber messed up the lyrics. “I’m so sorry!” wailed Amber. “This email I never finished reading to completion is weighing heavily on my pop music addled mind!”

Now that you have read this, you will meet Amber. Surprise, she’s moving in. Your roommate said it was ok. Amber’s 38 now and biffing those lyrics has completely ruined her life. She cannot move past it, despite an extensive amount of time and money spent in therapy. Her only coping strategy? Screeching the words to ‘Wannabe’ by your bedside every single night until you’re able to reassure her that she’s “spiced up your life”.

Want an end to the screeching?? Forward this email to ten former 90s kids who maybe want to add me on Twitter so I have a better follower ratio. If you do that I will kindly ask her to take it down a notch. See? I’m not the bad guy here.

WARNING: KEEP READING!

Hey. You did it! You made it to the end of the email! Was that so hard? One last thing: can you forward this to 50 people? And put ‘A Very Cool IT Guy Named Matt Sent Me This Email, We Should Hang With Him’ in the subject line?

OR ELSE!!!





The Legend Of Sleep-With-Me Hollow

Alex Gonzalez (he/him) is a horror & comedy writer. His scripts are represented by Thunder Avenue and his fiction is represented by Fine Print. He's also the co-creator of *You Are Not Alone*, a horror zine. He deleted his Facebook, gets sad on IG, but wilds out on Twitter. Alex sez, "Read 'The Cipher' by Kathe Koja. It just got its first reprint. It's a groundbreaking, wildly disturbing horror piece about art and unrequited love. Won mad awards." w: alex-gonzalez.me; @NahitsjustAlex (tw)

Egad it's cold! Come, come, close the door behind you and gather around the fire. Have a snifter of brandy and join us. I was just about to tell my story. Perhaps you know of it?

Gather round as I tell The Legend of Sleep-With-Me Hol-

low.

Oh, so you've heard the cries in the night woods just as I have? The wailing moans of a man begging to have his bones jumped? The bellowing cries from the simp on a steed, asking where his hug is? Yes. I'm afraid the Hessian is real. And his story is thus:

This guy rides around on a horse and absolutely nobody wants to fuck him.

I've seen him once, in the dappled moonlight of a forest path. His horse is a modest Palomino and the man himself is purely average, honestly, but if he's gonna keep asking for some action, it's just gonna put

you off. Like have a little pache. Put in a little work. Yet still he cries, "Why won't anyone fuck me?" And the whole thing is dour top to bottom.

There are numerous accounts as to how he became the way he is, but it's all conjecture. Some say he was jilted by a lover, forced into that fabled realm of the Friend Zone. Some say he took rejection too seriously and died watching "Joker." Some say he was the ugly friend in a group of hot friends and when he realised it, his head just burst!

Did I not mention he's headless?

Yeah, he's a Cephalophore, always carrying around his own head in one hand and a strip of expired Durex condoms in the other, begging any night traveler if they'd spare a nut, the jangle of his Chaturbate tokens heralding his approach. It's all really egregious.

“

*This guy rides
around on a horse
and absolutely
nobody wants to
fuck him.*

her a slut if she didn't oblige. Arthur said it was the saddest thing he'd ever witnessed. The worst part was that Arthur, being a stonemason, had a larger horse. A Clydesdale in fact. And the Horseman grew outraged and humiliated and rode off screaming that he was horsemogged. Nobody knew what that phrase meant until the scholar from the city finally told us. We all had a pretty somber

ing what he himself has sown. Maybe if he stopped calling girls femoids they'd wanna be near him. Maybe if he stopped calling villagers Chads and offered to learn their real names he'd find a community. I don't even think we have a Chad in this small town. My name is Mortimer for Christ's sake, which is hardly a lady-pulling name, but I do okay for myself. I don't own a horse either, but Jesus Christ, I've never used the word mogg before! Do you see what I'm saying??

Sorry. It's the brandy talking.

What hour is it? The night is darker than we started and the moon is behind the graphite clouds. Do you hear the whinny of a nearby horse? The steady approach of galloping? Listen carefully. On the wind you can hear the sounds of Cum Town and, even closer, the poor soul asking an E-Girl for her Dis-



Do you know Arthur the Stone Mason? He once had a run-in with the Horseman. Found him in the moorlands asking Twitch streamers for their OnlyFans. One poor maiden had to nuke her whole IG because he wouldn't get out of her comments. Kept asking for nude rates and then calling

laugh about it.

Here. Pour me some more brandy. The cold of the dark is at the threshold.

Do I feel bad for the Horseman? I suppose on particularly lonesome nights I've found myself relating. Yearning for the embrace of someone else. But perhaps, listeners, he's reap-

cord. Aye, let us stay by the fire. I can feel the chill in my bones.





I'm The Dybbuk Who Lives In Your Apartment, And We Need To Talk

Sophie Geffros (they/them) is an organizer, Ph.D. candidate, and general nuisance from Hamilton, Ontario. At any given time they can be probably be found yelling about housing and transit justice or cyberbullying the mayor. @sgeffros (tw)

DAY 1: Hey, Hannah? I'm the dybbuk who lives in your apartment, and we need to talk: *Get your shit together!*

Look I don't like this either, but I'm here, and I need your help – and you're no good to anyone like this. I know what it's like to be young – hell, I was young once, I had dreams and a future and a girl who loved me and who I loved in return. But nooooo, I was “poor” and “dabbled too much in forbidden knowledge” and they went and promised my beloved Leah to some guy named Nakham! He was such a prick!

So anyway, I swore revenge, died, possessed Nakham, and what did he do? That asshole got on a boat to the New World.

As you might have gathered, Leah never joined Nakham, Nakham died, and now I'm stuck here in your apartment, no host body of my own, watching you eat cereal for the fifth night in a row. And frankly, I've got better things to do – I'd slip inside right now, but your mind is just – kinda full? There isn't really any room in there. And you're taking terrible care of yourself, and like – if I wanted to pilot around a body of someone who hasn't had a vegetable in six months, I would have stayed on the Steppe.

So I'm gonna need you to get your act together. You're no good to me like this.

DAY 8: Ok, it's becoming obvious to me that you're not going to snap out of this on your own. Look, I don't really know what to do here. You're just kinda lying there like a lump, and it's really messing with my plans – I can't leave without a host, and I can't make you my host if you just spend all day staring at the wall. You do realise that causing mental illness is like, one of my things? You're really stepping on my toes here. I don't want to shlep around a body that's barely clinging to life already.

I'll be the first to acknowledge that I'm from a different time, but have you considered dying and possessing the body of your greatest enemy as a form of revenge? No? Ok, just spitballing here – no need to get mad, I'm just saying, that always made me feel better.

Why don't you call that lovely girlfriend of yours? She reminds me of Leah, a bit – I'm sure she'll know what to do. *etilius obunum*.

DAY 9: Ok, Hannah, just saying, if I were you, I wouldn't have led with "the vengeful spirit haunting my apartment thinks I should call you" – what on earth were you thinking?

Look, the 21st century is not a good time to be a vengeful spirit, and it's an even worse time to start telling people that you think you're being haunted by a vengeful spirit! So now your girlfriend thinks you've completely lost your mind, and you're just lying there, crying into your pillow. Are you going to, like, do anything about that? Again, I just need to remind you that "dying and possessing your enemy as a vengeful spirit" is an option that is open to you. Dying of a broken heart isn't any fun – take it from me – and if you're just going to mope all day, you're no good to me at all. Either make some room for me in your head or reap your revenge on those who have wronged you. This is just laziness!

Oh, stop crying. I didn't mean it like that. I'm sorry your girlfriend said you shouldn't see each other until you get a handle on your mental health issues. I'm sure that hurt to hear.

Just like. Please chill.

DAY 17: Ok, alright, going through her things – that seems like progress. And it's great to see you out of bed, it's been a while. Given that you have declined my only real advice about what to do in a break-up situation – and again, I want to emphasise that possessing your enemy is still on the table here – this seems like a passable second-choice strategy. Nice one.

Oh, wait, no – no, Hannah, what are you doing? I knew your ex was crunchy, but I didn't realise she was, like, burn-white-sage crunchy. I'm sorry you're lonely, but really, that won't help – oh, wait, do you think that burning that will get

rid of me? Or is it that it reminds you of her? Because quite frankly, I do not think I'm going to like the answer to either of those questions.

Please stop crying, that isn't going to work! I'm not that kind of ghost! Also, doesn't that seem kind of, you know ... appropriate? And that shit's endangered, too. That sounds like a surefire way to summon even *more* vengeful spirits, and it's already pretty crowded in here – much as I might like to have the company, you're kinda my girl, you know? Besides, you live in a one-bedroom apartment, and you're not exactly a balaboostah, it's pretty gross in here.

You know, this used to be a nice enough place before those developer schmucks came in and gentrified it and painted everything that weird charcoal grey. Sure, it was packed, and you'd have 10 people crammed in here, but they were happy! They were productive! Food to cook, prayers to sing, the whole nine yards. That was a good space for dybbukim, you know? Lots of people to watch, lots of people to bother – but none of them could help me like you can. It wasn't exactly prudent for any of them to get on a boat back to the Russian Steppe, there was kind of a whole thing happening.

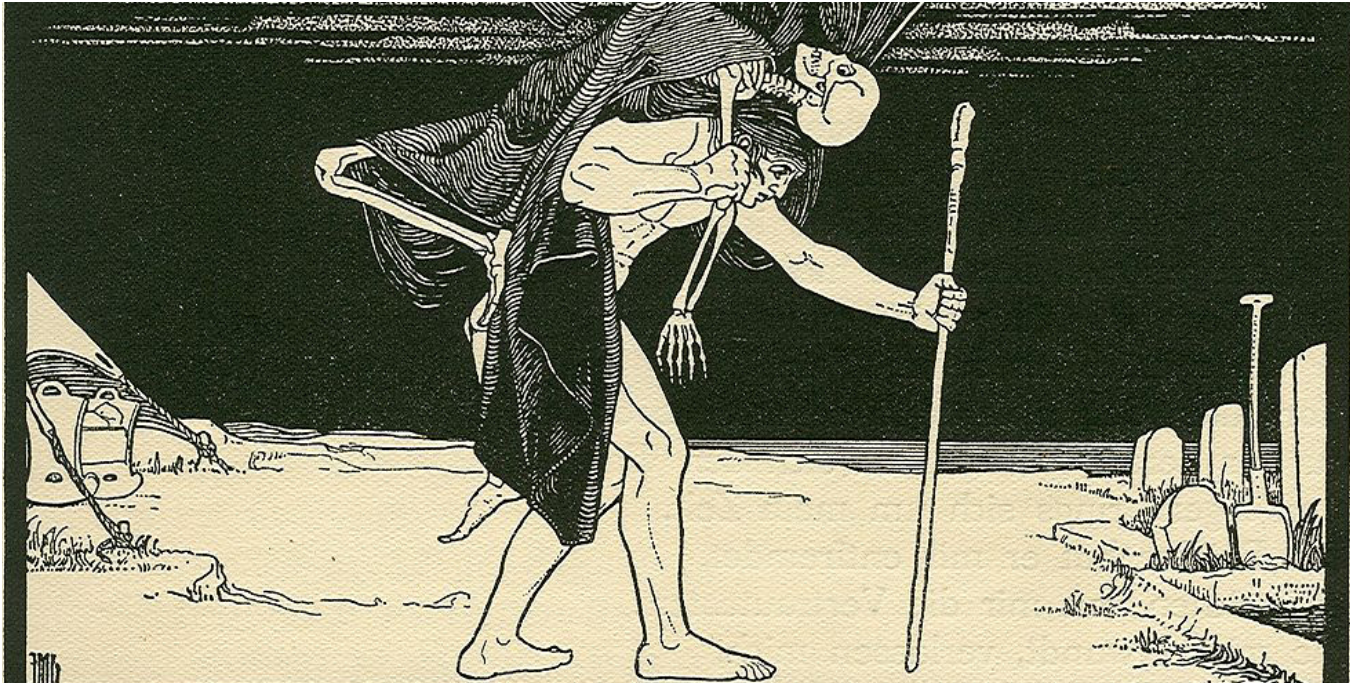
But you! You're a modern woman, you have a passport, you don't really have anything keeping you here, especially now that your girlfriend left you. I know, I know. It'll be ok. We don't have to talk about her any more.

You can help me, Hannah. You just need to get it together. I believe in you.

DAY 28: I see you talked to the Rabbi today! Good for you for getting up and leaving the apartment! I mean it, Hannah, way to go – 3 cheers for Hannah! You even put on clean clothes, that's awesome.

Now, I could have warned you about how that was going to go, but I doubt you'd have listened to me. Rabbis aren't really in the dybbuk-fighting business any more. Haven't been for a while – buddy of mine was in this lady's body in, what was it – the 1870s? The years kinda run together after a while. Anyway, she goes to see a rabbi, right? And she says "Rabbi, help, I think I've been possessed by a dybbuk."

What does he do? He washes his hands of the whole mishegoss, says she needs to see a psychiatrist instead. And that was back when psychiatry was just "take some cocaine and call me in the morning," so I'm not really surprised that's what your rabbi recommended, given all the modern treatments. I actually think it's a good idea – that buddy of mine certainly didn't mind it, and apparently the lady he was hanging out in – well, let's just say their relationship improved signifi-



cantly after that.

So you should definitely do it! I think it could really be good for you. I enjoy our chats, I really do, but you should probably call the doctor. Just – maybe don't mention me, ok? You saw how your ex reacted to that.

DAY 42: Wow, look at you, huh? You're doing great, bubbeleh. On meds, exercising, talking to the people you love – I'm so proud of you. You've really turned your life around. Good for you for calling your ex, too! I still think that "turning into a vengeful spirit and haunting her for all eternity" was an option there, but your way is probably easier.

You've really cleaned up in here, eh? Not just the apartment, although I think we're both pretty happy about that – seriously, when I first lived in this apartment there were 10 people to a room, and somehow it still smelled better than that. But you! Your head is clear, you're thinking straight – and really, you look great. I'm sure everyone is really proud of you.

Hey, just a question – while you're putting away that laundry, could you do some digging for your winter coat? Oh, you don't need to worry about why. It's just, we've got some business to attend to on the Russian Steppe – and I'm about 100 years late, so we should get a move on.

Author's note:

"If you want to get an idea of my mindset writing this, I have two recommendations: *The Dybbuk*, or *Between Two Worlds*, by S. Ansky (There are English translations available for purchase, but you can find a PDF if you look hard enough), and *The Internationale* by Daniel Kahn, Psoy Korolenko, and *Oy Division* – described as "dialectical klezmer cabaret", the album features old pieces of Yiddish radical music translated into English and Russian and remixed for the modern world. "Oy ir narishe tsionistn", an almost-straight rendition of a song from 1931, is a personal favourite – featuring the immortal lines "You want to take us to Jerusalem/ So we can die as a nation/ We'd rather stay in the Diaspora/ And fight for our liberation."

THE MOTHMAN'S PITCH FOR A NEW STATUE

Krissy Howard (she/her) is a New Mexico-based freelance writer and amateur seed saver. Her work has appeared on Reductress, Byrdie, and Cuteness, and she currently serves as managing editor of punk satire site, The Hard Times. Krissy recommends, "They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us by Hanif Abdurraqib." w: clippings.me/users/krissyhoward; @peoplefoood (ig)

I want to thank you all for coming to this meeting today. The Mothmans have been haunting the hills and hollers of this great state for decades now, and I honestly cannot think of a better place to terrorize average, hard-working people who would later go on to be dismissed as gullible bumpkins getting spooked by a heron or whatever.

This town has shown me and my family so much support over the years, as evidenced by the beautiful statue erected in my honour. I mean, between the giant, torn-apart butterfly wings on my moth body, which is actually a little problematic but we don't need to get into that now, and the fluffy patch of moth-fuzz on my decidedly ripped chest, a lot of great choices were made when constructing it. But you know what could make an already great thing even better? Completely redoing nearly every aspect of it.

So first thing's first, just kind of like, something that jumped out at me — the scariness. I think it could use more of it. Have you seen that one inside the museum? I feel like it might be papier-mâché but that thing is 10 times scarier than this statue. As it is, I'm just not getting "malevolent force" vibes, but I think that with just a few minor tweaks, we can get there. And we don't have to do the predictable thing and go Freddy Krueger scary. We're better than that, and to do anything so on the nose would be insulting to our audience. Think subtle, like, Hugh Jackman as Wolverine kinda vibes.

Nothing says "troubled supernatural bad boy" like a solid pair of jeans. Let's get those scrawny little pencil legs covered up with something in a dark wash, fitted, obviously, and not pre-distressed, because that will go out of style in a hot minute. Classic designs only.

We can figure out the details later, I know we're all busy, and I can tell by the way Linda's yawning and checking her phone every three minutes that she's tired, but if you turn to page two, paragraph three you will find my measurements, just in case anyone needs them. I included both US and EU sizes to keep things simple.

OK, the facial expression. When I sat for the artist, he actually caught me mid-sneeze. I haven't seen my mom so bummed since the school pictures incident of 1931. I asked if we could have a do-over but he got super snappy with me and said something about "his process" so I just dropped it.



"Legend of the Mothman"
On a chilly, fall night in November 1966, two young couples
drove into the TNT area north of Point Pleasant, West Virginia,
when they realized they were not alone.
What they saw that night has evolved into one of the great
mysteries of all time; hence the Mothman Legacy began. It has
grown into a phenomenon known all over the world by millions
of curious people asking questions: What really happened?
What did these people see? Has it been seen since?
It still sparks the world's curiosity - the mystery behind
Point Pleasant, West Virginia's MOTHMAN.
Sculpture by:
Artist and Sculptor
Bob Rosch
New Haven, West Virginia



Which brings me to the colour. So chrome definitely tells a story, like it has its time and place, but for the Mothman... well, I'm not sure if "shiny silver" is really doing what it needs to capture the sheer *terror* felt when one encounters me. I mean, c'mon: I'm an archetypical projection of humanity's deepest fears since the dawn of time over here. Can we step it up? Jason, I saw what you did with your Honda — we could do something like that, like matte black mixed with that colour change paint maybe? Jason, we'll talk after.

Plus, the rain and snow leave those dreaded water spots all over my likeness, and who has time to clean that? Certainly not anyone from the Point Pleasant Department of Parks and Recreation with a microfiber cloth, that's for sure! Just throwing that out there.

Also, and I don't mean to offend the creator of this piece because I think they made some great decisions, but the chrome thing kind of clashes with the giant red tail light-looking eyes. The combo makes me look like a 1950's diner or a marching band uniform, and I think we can all agree that neither of those things is sexy. If there's one thing Point Pleasant, West Virginia is synonymous with, it's sex. It's basically the Miami of the Ohio River. Anyway, simple tweak, hear me out: flame eyes. It would be the coolest if we could get them to shoot straight out, like in *True Lies* when Arnold DIY's a flamethrower with that MAC-10. Man, that was fucking so awesome.

Next up, can we talk about the hands? Can I say, I love, *love* that the statue's arms are positioned in a way that it looks like I might be about to grab you, or maybe



“

This town has shown me and my family so much support over the years, as evidenced by the beautiful statue erected in my honour. I mean, between the giant, torn-apart butterfly wings on my moth body, which is actually a little problematic but we don't need to get into that now, and the fluffy patch of moth-fuzz on my decidedly ripped chest, a lot of great choices were made when constructing it. But you know what could make an already great thing even better? Completely redoing nearly every aspect of it.

maybe trying to keep my balance on an icy patch but in a really cool way. But the shape of the hands? I won't get into the exact details, but a not-so-kind Trip Advisor commentator remarked that it “looks like the Mothman is jerking off two ghosts!” I think we can come back from this one easy though with a couple flippity-flips of the ol' bird. Or maybe one hand is holding a cig? Either way, I'd like to see someone write a two-star review about that!

Finally, I feel like I may have come off as supercritical this afternoon, so I just wanna give credit where credit is due — the abs. I fucking love them. I'm making a strong push to keep them, and frankly I think we could see even more of them. The Mothman statue basically cannot have too many abs, especially those ones on the sides and the part that's kind of near the pelvic bone, so when you wear pants that are kind of too low with no shirt on it seems like you might be close to showing pubes, but instead it's just more abs that most people didn't even know could grow there. Honestly though, I trust you guys and your vision, so I'll defer to you on the abs, all 26 of them.

Oh right, one last thing:, what do y'all think about adding a porch light near it or something? I honestly don't know how that detail got overlooked, but if we could just add a nice, flickering porchlight... now that, my friends, is art.

Shark Tank: Myths & Legends Edition

Johnny Mo (he/him) writes jokes for The Hard Times and bios for himself. Johnny sez you should check out “<https://thehardtimes.net/> – duh!” @Ethidopeian (tw)



“Reeling from a tumultuous election, deadly pandemic, and widespread unemployment, the once-proud nation of America finds not just its economy damaged but its spirit as well. Which is why the Sharks of ABC’s Shark Tank have invited creatures of myth and legend to breathe magic back into the heart of our country – through innovation.”

MEDUSA’S PITCH: INMEMORY

(A woman wearing a paper bag over her head walks through the door)

MEDUSA: Hello, Sharks! My name is Medusa and I am CEO of InMemory.

SHARKS: Hello/Good afternoon/Hi, Medusa

MARK CUBAN: Before we begin, I do apologise for Robert and Daymond’s absence – they must be running late.

LORI GREINER: That’s not like them...

MARK CUBAN: But I know you had a long journey so why don’t you go ahead and get started.

(Medusa clears her throat)

MEDUSA: Every single day in the earthly realm, a beloved pet is reported stolen. A theft that leaves young children companionless, relegates crazy cat ladies to plain old crazy ladies, and strips unwed adults—“fur mamas,” I believe they’re called in this realm—of their only personality trait. My company can ease the pain by eternally preserving the

memory of that fur baby in pure solid stone. Our anatomically correct, life-size stone replicas are so accurate, it will make you think your precious animal was right next to you, frozen in time.

MARK CUBAN: Okay, I definitely have questions. Do you own the quarry? How many stonemasons do you employ? And don't I know you from somewhere?

MEDUSA: I do not own a quarry, but I have access to an almost endless supply of free material; I do all the stonework myself; and uh, I did some modelling work for Versace. My face is all over their stuff, you probably know me from there.

LORI GREINER: Love it, Girlboss! I want to know if services are limited to cat and dog owners.

MEDUSA: Oh, Hades no! We also do rats, ferrets, birds— really *anything* I can get a good look at.

MARK CUBAN: Impressive.

BARBARA CORCORAN: Speaking of impressive, let's talk about your numbers: Nearly a third of the pets reported stolen in the US have had their likeness carved into stone by InMemory. How do your clients find you?

MEDUSA: Oh, they don't. I find them.

BARBARA CORCORAN: Ah, cold-calling, got it. Do any two statues look alike?

MEDUSA: No more than any two live animals would. InMemory truly captures the essence of your pet. Fearful expressions, terrified expressions, horrified expressions – we do it all!

MARK CUBAN: How would the investment capital be utilized?

MEDUSA: Well, I need to invest in more stonework supplies. Like bolt cutters, large nets, salami slices, catnip, tranquillisers and other such stone worker tools that would be difficult to explain to someone who isn't in the industry.

BARBARA CORCORAN: Ah, very well then. Let's talk about growth. Where do you see InMemory five years from now?

MEDUSA: Well, I definitely want to branch out into human statues.



Dracula: In His Own Words

Widget visited the count at his castle in Transylvania. We wanted to know, what makes this legendary monster tick? And how does he feel about his representation in film and literature?

Please enjoy this 'bloody' (🩸) good excerpt.

"People say to me all the time, 'Oh, you're so scary, you're so awful, blah blah blah... How could you kill all those innocent people?' I just wish they could see the real me.

"For example, did you know I love Jimmy Eat World? Well, I do. They're criminally underrated IMHO.

"I mean, the arrangements on Clarity (1999) are just so good. Like, from the second Jim's multi-tracked, contrapuntal harmonies with *himself* kick in on the opener, Table for Glasses, you're immediately like, 'Woah, they have come a *long* way from Static Prevails!' I mean, the Fuelled by Ramen EP sort of hinted at a more sophisticated direction but even *that* was lofi in comparison.

"Would you believe I first got into them from their cover of 'New Religion' on that Duran Duran comp? Wild!"

LORI GREINER: Very ambitious. Are you ready for that leap?

MEDUSA: Glad you asked!

(Medusa enthusiastically removes the tarp from the bulky figure beside her)

MARK CUBAN: Wow, it looks just like Daymond!

BARBARA CORCORAN: And that one's like Robert!

LORI GREINER: I know! Man, those two are missing out! Where the hell are they?

MEDUSA: Well, what do you say, Sharks! Do we have a deal?

BARBARA CORCORAN: It's really great, you weren't kidding about the detail. But I just don't see a large market for statues with agonised expressions. For that reason, I will pass.

LORI GREINER: The longer I stare, the deeper I find myself in the uncanny valley. There's *really* something unsettling about these statues.

MARK CUBAN: Right, Medusa. Very cool, but we're looking for an idea so great, it will single handedly save our middle class. I just don't see lawn decorations doing that.

MEDUSA: Thank you for the opportunity, everyone. I'll see you around.

Lori Greiner: I sincerely hope not!

(The Sharks and Medusa share a laugh)

BARBARA CORCORAN: Who's our next saviour from lore? tantem sil ublibus bondiis aut que virider ehemere ssenatuus ex menihilneque tesinam nic-tuus, oc firi publis sente.

CENTAUR'S PITCH: LOOKSYHOOPS

(A Centaur gallops through the doors)

MARK CUBAN: Welcome!

LORI GREINER: Why, good day.

BARBARA CORCORAN: Oh my. Good day indeed.

CENTAUR: Nay! A great day! I have travelled far and treacherous lands to bring forth before you a once in a lifetime investment opportunity.

LORI GREINER: I swear to God, if this is a tummy tea pyramid scheme I'll have you made into glue.

CENTAUR: Of course not! That would be stupid! Now, forget every-

thing you know about erection diversion technology. How often have you found yourself in a perfectly innocuous environment—say, a supermarket—only to find yourself stricken with an ill-timed, random erection. Shame courses through your body as your giant member knocks about into the shelves and boxed goods. No display is safe from the veiny appendage; satsumas cascade down the aisles between collapsing towers of baked beans. Happens all the time, right?

MARK CUBAN: Yeaaaah, I *totally* relate to that scene you described. I was just telling Daymond the other day how much I hate when that happens with my super big penis that I definitely have. He would tell you if he was here. Ahhh, but he's not. Dang.

CENTAUR: Fear not, those days are but distant memories – thanks to LooksyHoops! Sterling silver hoop earrings with attachable roadside flares for a trendy yet utilitarian look. When you unexpectedly find yourself experiencing an 'episode,' just light the flares. All eyes will be drawn to the hot orange flames and away from your hot pink penis.

BARBARA CORCORAN: Ingenious!

CENTAUR: Then, quickly retreat to a private area where your engorged member may deflate in peace, having successfully escaped without embarrassing yourself.

LORI GREINER: I would *love* a demonstration.

BARBARA CORCORAN: YES! I mean, please. And if you must arouse yourself in order to get into character, by all means. Please.

CENTAUR: But of course! Mark, if you would please try these on.

BARBARA AND LORI: *groan*

MARK CUBAN: My pleasure.. As someone who is the target audience for this product—

BARBARA AND LORI: *groan*

MARK CUBAN: I would be the logical choice.

(Centaur clips the LooksyHoops to Mark's ears)

LORI GREINER: Who's your flare supplier?

CENTAUR: We've partnered with the largest multinational technology conglomerate in the world.

(Centaur lights the LooksyHoops flares)

LORI GREINER: Amazon?

(Mark Cuban's head explodes)

CENTAUR: Acme.

LORI GREINER: Mark was your best shot and your product left him with a bloody stump for a head.

CENTAUR: Ah, but you see: you're so transfixed on that stump you haven't noticed his death-erection.

LORI GREINER: Well, I'll be damned.

BARBARA CORCORAN: Eh, what's to notice. But technically, you're right.

CENTAUR: What say you, remaining Sharks? Have we struck a deal?

LORI GREINER: I find it alarming that your products could potentially blow off the faces of our consumers. And this is a \$5,000 Chanel suit that you splattered with Mark's brains. For those reasons, I am out.

(Barbara finds Mark's tooth in her hair)

BARBARA CORCORAN: I too am out.

CENTAUR: Fine! If you'd rather tuck it up then suit yourselves! Animals.

(Centaur trots out the door)

BARBARA CORCORAN: Let's keep the ball rolling. I'd like to get out before Mark starts stinkin'.

GREG & ALLISON'S PITCH: RICH PARENTS™

(Two figures shrouded in vape smoke walk through the door)

LORI GREINER: Holy shit, it can't be.

BARBARA CORCORAN: Lori, the legends were true. They really do exist!

ALLISON: Hi, I'm Allison!

GREG: Hi, I'm Greg! And no, your eyes do not deceive you; we're a millennial couple that paid off our student loans.

ALLISON: That's right! We know the vast majority of American millennials aren't able to say the same, so we started a company to save our genera-

tion and genezrations to come. Today, we present to you...

ALLISON AND GREG: Rich Parents™!

LORI GREINER: How does it work?

ALLISON: To begin, we fly you first class to our oceanfront estate for brunch and wealth orientation.

GREG: All afternoon you'll familiarise yourself with the basics like the correct fork to use at dinner, which tax havens have the best club scene, fun community service ideas if you're charged with killing a pedestrian while driving drunk, that kind of stuff.

ALLISON: Once that concludes, you'll be escorted to the gorgeous shoreline where you then walk into the sea and die.

LORI GREINER: Literally die?

ALLISON: Yes, but stay with me. Everyone knows if you want to be rich and successful like we are it takes a lot of sacrifices. In this case, your life.

LORI GREINER: Good point. Continue.

GREG: Once dead, we take ownership of all your assets and you'll hopefully be reincarnated into a wealthy family with rich parents. And if not? Well, that's the beauty of our business. You can keep coming back over and over until you are!

LORI GREINER: You think clients will return?

GREG: Is Evian wet? Poor people will pretty much kill themselves for the promise of wealth.

ALLISON: Poor people are suckers!

Barbara Corcoran: I don't even need to hear your numbers. I'm on board!

LORI GREINER: As am I. You kids really earned your avocado toast tonight. Ha! Congratulations!

ALLISON: We won!?

GREG: Thank you, Jesus!

JESUS PITCH: LUNCH?

(Jesus pushes a food cart through the doors)

Hellooooo, Shar— oop, heard my name, sorry.

(Jesus retreats back through the doors)



BLACK MILLENNIAL NURSERY RHYMES

Khadjiah Johnson (she/her) is a Afro-Caribbean American writer and performer from Brooklyn whose honors include The Maxx You Project and a nomination for “The 2019 Best of Net Anthology” for her poetic comedy “Shady Shepherd Psalm.” You can find some of her work at Madison Square Garden, BET and Emrys Journal. She currently serves as a Staff Writer for Black Nerd Problems, a Freelancer for Funimation and staffed at Last Week Tonight with John Oliver. Khadjiah recommends, “*Reading: Travesty Generator* – Lillian-Yvonne Bertram; *Rock. Salt. Stone.* – Rosamond King; *We Inherit What the Fires Left* – William Evans; Any poems from Nkosi Nkululeko; (*Unrelated to poetry*) Anything on Blacknerdproblems.com; *Video Games: Persona 5 Royal* *Television: Anime.* (Especially Fullmetal Alchemist Brotherhood, Haikyuu and My Hero Academia).”

w: authority.com/KhadjiahJohnson; @iamkdjiah (tw; ig)

No White Man (*To the tune of This Old Man*)

No white man
Gon’ play me
Screenshot slur to his company
With a swipe, and some hype, OOP!
Now you lost yo’ job
Next time don’t be racist, Bob.

Itsy Bitsy ’ppressors (*To the tune of Itsy Bitsy Spider*)

Itsy bitsy ’ppressors sailed across the seas
Colonised the islands, and gave them all disease
Whitewashed their culture, pretended they meant well
That’s why the Itsy Bitsy ’ppressors, should be damned to hell.

Cops and the White Girl! (*To the tune of Pop! Goes The Weasel*)

All around the gentrified hood
White woman calls the cops on us
Policemen take her word for it all
COPS! and the white girl.

Please Spare my Edges (*To the tune of The Wheels on the Bus*)

My edges after braids go
Snatch, snatch, snatch

Please detach
Don’t leave a patch.

My edges after braids go
Snatch, snatch, snatch
Please spare my scalp.

Picking my Wigs (*To the tune of Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Moe*)

Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Moe
Ali vendor, trust or no?
That Remy lethal, watch it flow
Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Moe

Scam The Daddies (*To the tune of Skip to My Lou*)

Spent my rent money, what will I do?
Spent my school money, what will I do?
Spent my bill money, what will I do?
Sugar Daddies all season.

Sug-sug-sugar daddies
Scam-scam-scam the daddies
Sug-sug-sugar daddies
Scam the Daddies, my Darlin’.

Rent, Rent Go Away (*To the tune of Rain, Rain Go Away*)

Rent, rent go away
Pockets empty, I can’t pay
Need three bands, so I should pray
Rent, rent go away.



My Wallet *(To the tune of London Bridge)*

When my wallet tumbles down,
It hits the ground and makes no sound
My net worth keeps tumbling down
The one percent mocks me.

Auntie Sheryl's Shade Cafe *(To the tune of I'm a Little Teapot)*

I like all my tea hot, don't cop out
Spill me the tea and leave nothing out
Hit you with the head nod, sip and shout
I thrive in the shade, so feed my clout.

Dry Ass Colonizer *(To the tune of Row, Row, Row Your Boat)*

Dry ass colonizer
Got no reasoning
You out here stealing from Black people
but you don't
Use our seasonings?

Y'all Mad Racist *(To the tune of Baa Baa Black Sheep)*

Neo Nazis
Finna catch a fade
One DROP, two DROP
Bodies laid.

Fade for the time you
Felt really brave
Pulled up to your crib
Now really, what's good Dave?





Left At the Altar

James Brown (he/him) is a writer and comedian from Montreal. He hosted a show *Squad Laughs* was pretty popular back when you could have indoor gatherings. James recommends, “Theft By Finding – David Sedaris. I thought it’d be boring to read someone else’s diaries but it was actually great. I appreciate how petty David Sedaris can be. This book made me want to go to IHOP. [And] ‘He just swallowed a roach’ – Youtube. A young adult swallows a roach (weed) and his friend is rude to some bystanders. Not sure how this has under a million views, I think this is the best video on the internet. @atjamesbrown (tw); @badjamesbrown (ig)

Sadie and I are anything but traditional. We drag tradition through the mud and bury it in the backyard, then we shit on the place where we buried it. And yet, it brings a tear to my eye seeing Sadie walked down the aisle by her father.

Though I guess he’s not re-

ally her father. Well, not her *biological* father I should say. Sadie was adopted.

He’s actually the one who introduced me to Sadie – see, Derek’s a friend of mine. Some people are put off by the fact that I’m marrying my friend’s little girl. Other people give us a hard time about the age dif-

ference. But the truth is, Sadie ages differently than the rest of us.

When I first met her, I didn’t plan on falling in love, but you don’t plan these sorts of things, they just happen...

Whoops! Sadie’s humping that stranger’s leg, and I really think that that’s inappropriate

on our wedding day. One sec.

"Sadie, Stop!" Jesus Christ I really didn't want to have to do this today. "Heel!"

OK, she's stopped now. Come on Sadie, just walk over here. Maybe if I click my tongue like this: *tsk tsk tsk, pssssp!* "Here Sadie, come on now". There we go, now she's coming down.

Where was I?

You know, I never thought I had a chance with Sadie, until the day that I saw Guy Fieri officiate 101 gay weddings. It was such a powerful statement! It meant that the sanctity of marriage had dissolved to a point where we were finally allowing Guy Fieri to officiate weddings.

To me, that day finally showed that love could break all boundaries. That day I decided I was going to marry Sadie.

My parents were horrified, of course. Their objections were predictable to say the least. "Sadie's a dog," my mom sobbed. "You can't marry a dog!"

Even after I played her that clip she liked so much, where Rush Limbaugh says that if same-sex couples could marry each other, pretty soon people would be marrying *dogs*... Even after that, she still didn't get it. "That was a joke," she cried.

But how could it have been a joke? He didn't say "just kidding" afterwards.

Dad held Mom as she sobbed. He'd been silent the whole time, but worked up the courage to speak.

"My son will not be fucking a dog!"

"Oh gross! I'm not going to 'screw the pooch'—I never swear in front of my mother—"Our relationship isn't like that, our bond is deeper, and plus, she can't consent. She'll continue to have sex with dogs, and I'll continue to have sex with... well, myself."

My father looked confused. "But if the dog is your wife," he

“

*But they're not
laughing anymore.*

*In fact, I haven't
seen them laugh,
or smile, since that
day.*

started, "and it has sex with other dogs, wouldn't that make you a...?"

"Yes dad, a cuck. I'm a liberal cuck, ok? Laugh it up dad, real mature."

But they're not laughing anymore. In fact, I haven't seen them laugh, or smile, since that day.

But that's beside the point, I don't need to think about that. This is my wedding day.

Wow, I can't believe it's really happening. Derek just handed Sadie to me, she's really here, we're really doing this. I'm welling up. The Guy Fieri impersonator is about to start the ceremony.

Even though we had our differences, I'm glad my parents decided to come.

I wish they'd sat up front though, in the seats reserved for family. I can barely see them over there in the back pew. I can make out Dad, he looks pale, but Mom's hiding her face behind the wedding program. I think I'll give them a wink. Maybe that'll cheer 'em up, to see how happy I am up here.

wink

There we go, Mom's put down the program, it's so nice to see her face. Aww, look at that, her expression's changing. I think she's starting to smile! I knew she'd be so happy once

she just learned to accept that... Oh, oh no.

"Someone get a bucket!"

Goddammit Mom, really? On my special day?

I guess she's throwing up out of happiness? She's probably experiencing so much joy that she just can't contain herself. And those tears, they must be happy tears.

"Do we have a mop in here? Sadie, you stay, I'll go clean it up. Sadie. Stay. Sit. Sadie. No Sadie, come back, no don't go over there! Sadie, don't.... Oh no. Sadie, no that's not food Sadie. That's.... Mom, it's fine. Mom, take off your shoes. Well, it's all over your shoes, what do you expect her to do?! She's already eating it, just take off your fucking shoes! I mean, take off your darn shoes... I'm sorry for swearing."

Ok, Mom's heading out for some air. That's a good idea, I know she's just overwhelmed. There's too much joy in the room is all. Enjoy the fresh air, Mom, we'll be here when you get back. Just remember to close the door on the way—Goddamn it!

"Someone shut the door! Derek, shut it now! There's a squirrel, Derek! Shut it before—Sadie! No, Sadie! Come back! Sadie! Nooo!"

I'd dreamed of this day ever since I was a little boy. I'd done everything right. Found the girl of my dreams and asked her to marry me. Booked the venue, hired a caterer, bought the cake. I did it all and I did it right. But here I am now, alone. All alone.

Maybe Rush Limbaugh was right, maybe we shouldn't marry dogs. Yeah, that's going too far. They're way too fast! Now a turtle, on the other hand...

I'M LA LLORONA AND I'D LIKE TO ARRANGE A TIME TO RETURN YOUR ANNOYING 'GIFTED KID'

Lauren Lavín (she/her) was made in Mexico and born in Oakland. She's an editor & contributor for The Hard Times. Lauren recommends, "The Act of Killing (2012); Eastern Span by Rick Paulas; American Splendor comics." @lalavin666 (tw)

Buenos dias. It is I, the weeping woman who drowned my babies in a fit of mad, jealous rage untold years ago, and now roam the waterfront as a ghost. There's no easy way to say this – literally, it took all my concentration just to get this message to you through the multiple dimensions that separate the dead from the living over the sound of your child naming all the state capitals in the US – but, I deeply regret seizing your 'gifted kid' into my eternal realm, and would like to arrange to return her to you as soon as possible.

I'm not certain how time and space work for you relative to the hellish limbo I occupy, but I'm flexible, and desperate. I just can't bear one more endless cry-session about how misunderstood and anxious your pretentious glue-sniffer feels because you, her mother, have bragged about her flute prowess to friends one too many times. Name the time and place, and I'll materialise with her, assuming she isn't in the middle of some awful, thrashing 'modern dance.'

Look, this is very unusual and awkward for me, as I'm sure it must be for you. In my countless years roaming the woods to steal reckless children, this is only the second time I've had to return one. The other was some time ago, and he was French, somehow, in the middle of nowhere, West Texas. He had way too many opinions about wine for a five-year-old. Your kid is worse.





For starters, she was doing some kind of long-exposure night photography in the woods when I found her. Not very bright to be alone in a fog-dense forest trying to photograph moths or whatever all by herself. If she's so gifted, how come she didn't think about that? And why such dismal composition in her photos?

I know it probably seems out of place for me to be offering parenting advice, as I drowned my own children before taking my life and am cursed to steal other people's children for all eternity, but I think you've got ample room for improvement. Granted I'm from a bygone era, but did bullying go out of style? Please consider bringing it back, as I'm sure this would humble your little dweeb, who hasn't stopped correcting my grammar since I dragged her kicking and screaming to the nether regions in the middle of the night. I never held back from being stern with my own children, and they were perfectly well-behaved and popular, until I snapped. But you know, that's on me.

Please respond as soon as you get this. She's reciting what she calls "poetry." I wasn't a perfect mother, but nobody deserves to be subjected to endless strings of spontaneous haiku about moths.

The background image shows two humanoid figures with a metallic, reflective silver finish. They have large, dark, almond-shaped eyes and a smooth, featureless face. They are standing in a futuristic, curved corridor that resembles the interior of a space station. To their right is a large, curved window or observation deck that looks out onto the Earth from space. The Earth's surface is visible, showing a blue horizon, white clouds, and a dark, star-filled sky. The lighting is dramatic, with bright light coming from the window and reflecting off the metallic surfaces of the figures and the station's interior.

A MODERN BESTIARY OF HUMANS

Caitlin Kunkel (she/her) is a writer, teacher, and highly acclaimed pizza scientist. Her work has been featured in The New York Times, The New Yorker, and McSweeney's Internet Tendency. She created the Online Satire Writing Program for The Second City and co-created the Satire and Humor Festival. Caitlin sez, "I recommend 750words.com. Use it to free write, do morning pages, or work out parts of a longer work. Never in my life have I written every day, but I'm on a 110 day streak right now! It helps build your writing muscle so more words come more easily and consistently over time."

w: caitlinkunkel.com; @kunkeltron (tw; ig)

COMPILED BY
QUEEG-14. The following compendium was presented at The Council of the Nine, following Queeg-14's successful scouting expedition to Earth in Annorum 657478 ("human year" 2021). Queeg-14 thanks the Council for their hallowed review of this modest work, a classification of modern human beasts:

THE BOTH-SIDER: Physically, most often a pale-skinned human wearing a "suit," the Both-Sider's traditional outfit meant to denote respectability and intellect. However, contrary to their appearance, Both-Siders seem incapable of constructing an argument without creating false dichotomies between two non-equivalent things. Spend large amounts of time talking, very little time thinking. Queeg-14 found exhausting; recommend liquidating for medical use. "Sadie, Stop!" Jesus Christ I really didn't want to have to do this today. "Heel!"

THE CONSPIRACY THEORIST: Queeg-14 was concerned this group of self-proclaimed "truth-seekers" would be closest to understanding The Council of the Nine's grand plan for humanity, but they were...very focused on child sex trafficking rings. Like, weirdly focused on that one very specific thing, to the point that none of them noticed Queeg-14, a literal alien being, in their midst. One-track minds. Do not abduct.

THE REPLY GUY: Disembodied; Queeg-14 never saw one "reply guy" in the wild, but found ample written evidence of their work online. While this human variant can be of any gender identity, they

most commonly manifest as males who "reply" to comments or conversations where they have no expertise and are not wanted. Often form imaginary relationships with those they are "replying" to. Desperate for conversation and validation; we may be able to harvest their yearning for connection and turn it into the emotional energy desperately needed to power Stratum-422.

THE LIFE HACK GURU: Physicality is notable for its crunched posture, red eyes from too much screen time, and unsteady gut due to massive caffeine ingestion. This human variant spends their entire life writing "listicles" on ways in which other humans can save tiny amounts of time. They are kept up at night haunted by the abstract concept of "Search Engine Optimization." Would benefit from several years hard labor in the secretion huts. Paradoxical creatures; given to over simplifications; in Queeg-14's opinion, need to drink more water.

THE GAMER: 🎮 🎮 **Warning** 🎮 🎮 These humans have vast, interconnected networks where they chat with each other in fictional worlds as well as gather to watch one another defeat enemies in those worlds. They openly share battle strategies (strangely rife with Earth slurs) and train for many hours a day. Quite dangerous to us; very advanced in combat. Recommend neutralizing them first when the takeover begins. Queeg-14 did like their headsets a lot.

THE TECH BRO: Queeg-14 regrets being so blunt, but: abhorrent creatures. They already track all their biological metrics on small devices they

willingly wear on their bodies. Never shut up; believe skill in one area translates to skill in many other areas despite no such training. Prime to be the first group to be eaten by The Council of the Nine. Queeg-14 is sorry to repeat, but it must be said again: very annoying.

THE POLITICIAN: Well-groomed; expensive body coverings and hair; however Queeg's scans for heart activity were inconclusive. These humans claim to represent the masses, though their true allegiance is to other creatures such as "corporate donors" and "pharma lobbyists." Simulate solidarity with limited success. Leave them to rot — they serve no value, in Queeg-14's opinion, not even as much-needed fertilizer for the organ fields in Stratum-422.

THE COMEDIAN: This human variant willingly shares exorbitant amounts of embarrassing personal information on various internet websites seemingly with no concern for their future employment. However, they are also easily subordinated with mild flattery, which gives them value as cannon fodder in the coming wars. Many seem to have a side interest in neuroscience, as there is much chatter in their community about deficits in "serotonin" and "dopamine" as well as accusations of "smooth brains." Allow, in very limited amounts so as not to grow tired of them.

And there you have it: a Modern Bestiary of Humans. Despite potential usefulness of some human variants, Queeg-14 deems this iteration a failure. Recommend restarting the simulation immediately.





“Where Should They Be Now?”: Trump’s Cabinet Officials

Meghana (Meg) Indurti (she/her) is a stand up comedian and humor writer, currently contributing to Reductress, The Hard Times, and The New Yorker. Meg recommends, “Books, do your reading. Read Angela Davis (Women, Race & Class, Are Prisons Obsolete? Freedom is a Constant Struggle), Huey P. Newton, Black Panthers Speak, Howard Zinn (A People’s History, Disobedience & Democracy)” and also “Don’t trust your government kids.”

w: megindurti.com; @megindurti (tw; ig)

BY SATAN. Welcome, my fellow devils, to “Where Should They Be Now?”: The supernatural game show where we find out where our abominable people *should’ve* been, rather than where they *are*.

You see, Hell is usually a well-oiled machine but we do make mistakes. Our newest interns (John McCain and Nancy Reagan) must have misfiled the paperwork for today’s contestants. Useless!

Anyway, the following people, who were supposed to be elsewhere, accidentally ended up in President Trump’s cabinet.

So let’s play a game of “Where *should* they be now?”

1. **MIKE PENCE:** First up is Mike Pence, a real nasty piece-of-work. You may have noticed that he almost never speaks. While many argue the VP should’ve been more vocal for human rights, the truth is he wasn’t actually supposed to be human at all.

So...where *should* he be?

Pence was originally supposed to be a centaur galloping through a forest – flying through a field, as half-horse, half-man, never having to speak to a woman or a man. In fact, never speaking at all.

The Vice-President was known for his repeated gutting of protections against the LGBTQ+ community and his stance against same-sex marriage. What you may not

realise is, Pence secretly opposes marriage between *all* humans. That's right! To hide his attraction to woodland animals, he even married a human woman. In reality, it was the tender touch of a hoof he desired most. For in his heart, he was a centaur.

We are all working overtime to get him back to chasing the moon in silence.

2. STEVE MNUCHIN: Steve here is the Secretary of Treasury and former producer for "Entourage," a show that made more people vain and greedy than even I. Way to go, Steve!

So...where *should* he be?

If our interns hadn't made a clerical error, Mnuchin was supposed to be a broken traffic light at a confusing 5-way intersection. The kind of light that lands on red and stays there for *wayyy* too long, much like Entourage. So long, in fact, that cars start inching forward with impatience and when the light finally *does* turn green, there is an immediate car crash. Perhaps a 15-car pile-up if it's my lucky day.

He'd inconvenience everyone and make them late to work, causing some to lose their jobs, just as he did as Secretary of Treasury when he tanked the economy and pushed the unemployment rate to new heights. No amount of honking can keep people out of this rat race!

Rest assured, we're doing all we can to make sure Mnuch' is sorted back to his proper fate ASAP so he can continue bringing ill to all those who cross his path.

3. JEFF SESSIONS: Jeff Sessions was the former Attorney General and an icon for all of us pointy-eared demons. Like many of his cabinet-members-in-crime, 'Sesh' – that's his nickname down here – 'Sesh' has already led a long, rich life of screwing people over.

He supported the Iraq War, nice! Tax cuts for the rich, yeah, screw the poors! The deportation of immigrants, who needs' em? He wanted to punish people dealing weed with the death sentence! (Unfortunately, most of these people went to heaven UGH.) He pushed to take "Islamic" books out of libraries, fought to keep marriage between a man and a woman, and was literally hated by Coretta Scott King. An icon! I'm blushing thinking about how many lives this man has destroyed.

So...where *should* he be?

The Sesh Man was originally supposed to be a sentient boy puppet. One owned by a white couple moving to gentrify a neighbourhood in Oakland. He'd make just enough noise in the middle of the night to creep out the child and make the rest of the family think she's got something wrong with her. He'd hide the car keys, lay

on the steps in the dark to trip people, and scare the dog to keep him barking all night.

As we speak, we are transitioning him back into his puppet elf costume.

4. BETSY DeVOS: Betsy DeVos is the Secretary of Education. Which was an incredible achievement for someone who so vehemently opposed education!

She fought to cut funding for under-performing schools, cut protections for student loan borrowers, reshape guidelines protecting sexual assault survivors, and – get this, this one is my FAVOURITE! – during the pandemic, she redirected all the money from public schools towards private and religious schools. Ha! Even I couldn't even think of something so evil.

Fan-deviling so hard right now.

So...where *should* she be?

Clearly, Betsy D. relishes tormenting America's students, an act she's had to cloak with liberal phrases in the modern era. Well, that's because she was born in the wrong era.

If it hadn't been for those interns' mistakes, ole Bets would be a teacher in the rural south in the 1920s. I'd say somewhere like Alabama, where she could openly attack poor and Black students and do it proudly. She'd mock immigrants' accents. She'd take away hungry people's lunches. She'd have the class read her personal copy of "Huck Finn," one where every word *but* the N-word is censored.

While she may have done much of this in her current life anyway, we're filing the necessary paperwork to bring her back to the 20s where she belongs.

5. STEPHEN MILLER: Stephen Miller is the Senior Advisor for Policy to the President and the architect of the policy that separated migrant children from their parents.

This magnificent bastard tucked into bed every night imagining with joy the cries of those caged children. Ditto, Steve. Ditto.

So...where *should* he be?

There's a reason Fivehead here enjoys bringing misery to all, it's because he was actually supposed to be the owner of a combination crematorium and funeral home. He already has the gaunt, vampire-like appearance required for the role.

He would've used his position to help murderers get away with their acts. That's why he was *supposed* to be in California, the state with the most serial killers per capita.

His cunning and lack of empathy for any and all could've been put to great use at the hub of death and grief. In his free time, when murders were low, he could've killed some innocent ani-



mals too. Oh well. At least he still spread just as much wickedness from his position in Trump's cabinet.

However, we are doing everything we can to bring him back to a funeral home so that he can continue enjoying the sound of crying as families are separated from their loved ones.



Happily Ever After Real Estate Listings

Shea Strauss (she/her) is a writer, illustrator, & designer in New York City. She writes songs to her cat and, less often, articles for *The Hard Times* and *The New Yorker*. Shea sez, “I recommend, if you’re on Twitter, following Rebecca Caplan at @NotThatReba, if you’re into the comedy scene, reading *Shrill* by Lindy West, and, if you want to grow as a human being, finally get around to reading *All About Love* by bell hooks.” w: sheastrauss.com; @sheastrauss (tw); @sheadoodles (ig)

Whether you’re a lovable protagonist or a cannibalistic villain, we have the perfect home for your Happily Ever After! These listings all have storied pasts, straight out of a fairy tale!

THE WITCH’S HOUSE (*made famous by Hansel and Gretel*): If you have a sweet tooth, we have a deal to die for! Tucked away in the middle of bread-crumbsown woods (but still within walking distance of great schools) is a charming fixer-upper. This is perfect for anyone who loves both baking and renovations, as this house’s structure could use some confectionary improvements. Made from real gingerbread, cake, and pas-

tries, it comes only slightly eaten. But, it will need some TLC to keep it from getting too stale or sticky. Are you a singing princess? This may be a great vacation home for you to make new animal friends!

The kitchen comes with vintage cages and a large cauldron, big enough for any child prisoners you may be preparing to eat.

TOWER (*previously occupied by Rapunzel*): Want to get away from it all? Look no further than the ultimate seclusion of this 1-room, 26-storey beauty. Leave your cares behind in this cozy high-rise, with all the luxuries a princess could desire. The previous owner swears by its captive-holding capabilities, espe-

cially if you remember to cut their hair sometimes. Home inspector's summary: foundations in good shape, shower drains completely clogged.

Showings available, but please bring your own ladder.

BRICK HOUSE (*built by the smartest of the Three Little Pigs*): A beautiful, if small, brick house. Large enough to hold multiple animals. Strong enough to withstand heavy wind storms. Includes real working fireplace – an effective deterrent to home invasion! Previous owners are offering a real wolf skin rug with purchase, provided you agree to keep the household pork-free.

Free nearby: a pile of straw and sticks.

ENCHANTED CASTLE (*previous tenants: Beauty and the Beast*): Great location on the outskirts of Little Town, Quiet Village. Meticulously maintained 15-bed, 0-bath castle. Giant library, if you're one of those funny girls who enjoys reading. A forbidden West Wing adds mystery and intrigue for any curious guests.

Pre-furnished with rare, enchanted antiques, eager to serve your every need. Concerned about owning sentient

beings? All furniture has the option to be returned to human form, with payment of True Love's Kiss.

THREE BEAR HOUSE (*as visited by Goldilocks*): Do you and your roommates constantly fight over the temperature? Well, fight no more! This charming, rustic abode is the perfect home for household members of varying tastes! Featuring a welcoming kitchen, living room, and bedroom – all with three adjustable elements of warmth, size, and comfort!

Please note: this property is not human-proofed. We recommend you install a security system to prevent break-ins. Porridge insurance required.

About us: With over 5,000 years of experience, Happily Ever After Real Estate makes wishes come true. We advise contacting Rumpelstiltskin for any payment issues, who will work with you to finance your first born.





I'm Sorry, Curiosity Shoppe Cannot Offer A Refund For Your Monkey's Paw

Kyrie Gray (she/her) is a freelancer by day and writer/ avid salt and vinegar eater most of the other time. She edits the humor site Jane Austen's Wastebasket and can often be found doodling something weird. Kyrie sez, "If you love horror, check out *Into the Drowning Deep*" and "If you want to see some behind-the-scenes stuff I have a tiny little newsletter where I do live readings and show the step-by-step process for how I produce my odd pieces. <https://guffaw.substack.com/p/how-a-bad-top-bun-became-good-inspiration>." w: medium.com/jane-austens-wastebasket; @Hungrynotahippo (tw)

Hello Mr. Mathews,
Thank you for writing to Curiosity Shoppe's help desk. We're here to make your dreams come true. Within reason, of course.

Unfortunately, due to very strict return guidelines, I cannot give you a refund for the

Monkey's Paw you purchased. Though you have not used it yet, you state the case's seal is broken. This invalidates the 90-day return policy. I apologise for any inconvenience, Mr. Mathews. I hope you can still enjoy your Monkey's Paw.

Amy Scuttles, Customer Service Representative

Did I help you today?

😊 😐 😞

* * *

Good morning Mr. Mathews,

Thank you for writing in again.

I understand that you're feeling some level of anger over your failed first wish. Unfortun-

nately, the Curiosity Shoppe is not responsible for product misuse. Surely the associate who sold you the rare oddity included the "Be careful what you wish for" rundown along with the standard ominous laugh before disappearing in a puff of smoke? It is company policy.

Even if she were derelict in her duties, the Monkey's Paw does come with an ancient scroll of instructions attached to the sales receipt. It is translated into 89 of the most commonly-used languages. Had you read it you would have known the risk of asking the Monkey's Paw to grant your desires. Frankly, I believe you should consider yourself lucky that, when the box sealed itself, your child only lost his hand. If I were you, I'd put that item behind glass and keep it as a curiosity to spark dinner conversations.

But to confirm the answer to your question, no, I will not be able to process a return.

Have a great day.

Amy Scuttle, Customer Service Representative

Did I help you today?

☺ ☹ ☹

* * *

Dear Mr. Mathews,

Lovely to hear from you on this fine day. To answer your question, yes, we have actually quite suddenly changed our policies. The bad news is we still can't accept your return.

We've changed our policies around using plastics. The Curiosity Shoppe Company is now leaning all the way into devouring our competition, no matter what the cost. Since plastics are cheaper to make, ship, and store, our owners have stopped selling anything biodegradable in our stores. Nothing that was once living graces our shelves or is included in the return policy.

“

While we do sell living things again now, it's not on purpose. Some unholy force (MAYBE LIKE A MONKEY'S PAW?!?!) caused all of our merchandise to come to life.

This includes the off-brand American Girl dolls made with real children's teeth.

This includes the manifestation journal with the premium human skin cover..

And this of course includes the mummified remains of a primate's appendage.

Have a great day Mr. Mathews.

Amy403-61, Customer Service Representative

Did I help you today?

☺ ☹ ☹

* * *

Greetings Mr. Mathews

I beg you, please stop trying to return this paw. It wasn't meant to be. Or, at the very least, stop making wishes on it. Can't you see what it's doing? It's feeding on your ego, the part of you that believes you are always right and that you will be the first person clever enough to trick both a Monkey's Paw and Curiosity Shoppe's extremely stringent return policy!

Yes, I know you made another wish. Why else would you write in with such confidence that I'm going to give you a return after all this time?

While we do sell living things again now, it's not on purpose. Some unholy force (MAYBE LIKE A MONKEY'S PAW?!?!)

caused all of our merchandise to come to life. Our wide selection of plastic curiosities all awoke at once in our stores, warehouses, and customers' homes and began their murderous rampage.

I write to you now from inside one of our building's safe rooms, having fought my way through their hordes. The CEO is gone. A talking doll with the soul of a dead child dragged him down the stairs last I saw. So I'm afraid I can't escalate this any further. I suggest you don't either. You've got one more wish! Stop while you're ahead and put it on your mantle as a reminder that buyer's remorse is your problem and not mine.

Thank you, have a nice day, and for god's sake, hide with your loved ones until these horrors are defeated.

Amy403-61, Customer Service Representative and badass with a spear it seems

Did I help you today?

☺ ☹ ☹

* * *

Hello Mr. Mathews,

I'm writing to send you your schedule for your onboarding next week. I know that making a wish for more wishes did not give you the intended result. Once again, if you had bothered to read that scroll, you would know that the wish for more wishes automatically causes all active wishes to stop. Then you are granted the power you desired. To make wishes come true—

AS A MEMBER OF THE CURIOSITY SHOPPE CUSTOMER SERVICE TEAM! Where we make sure *every* customer gets what they ask for.

Within reason, of course.

Amy403-61, Head of Customer Service Training Program

Did I help you today?

☺ ☹ ☹

THE MYTHICAL AQUARIANS THAT DON'T HAVE COMMITMENT ISSUES

Aquarians are known for being emotionally distant. Some might even call them 'unfeeling jerks.' (Those people are wrong, of course, but entitled to their opinion – regardless of how much it is based in jealousy. Is this narrator an Aquarius? Yes, but that has nothing to do with our story.) Brace yourself, reader, as we explore what happens when the stars and planets make a grave error... This is the story of the two mythical Aquarians that *don't* have commitment issues.

There once were two people named Olivia and Mark who lived in a small town called Silver Lake. Oliva's birthday was January 28th and Mark's was February 11th, making them both Aquarians.

The two found themselves on Tinder, an app most commonly used by people with commitment issues to meet and commit infidelity against one another. Tinder attracted many Aquarians. Aquarians, you see, are famous for their commitment issues. These two Aquarians, however, had both been going to therapy and were prepared to communicate with future partners.

It was a hot July evening when they agreed to meet and go for a coffee date at the old, haunted Intelligentsia on Sunset. Olivia ordered an almond milk latte and sat in the darkest, most distant corner of the coffee shop. Mark arrived fifteen minutes late with a leashed dog.

They sat awkwardly for a moment. The tension was palpable. Both were deciding whether they were 'not looking for anything serious' for the millionth time. Finally, Mark broke the tension. "I'm not very good at this," he told Olivia. Excited by his honest vulnerability, she joined in, "I'm not very good at this either."

Mark told Olivia that he had spent the past



Kaitlyn Jeffers (she/her) is a stand-up comedian and writer based in Los Angeles. She was recently named one of Illuminative's Top 25 Native American Comedians to Watch, and is a contributing writer for The Hard Times. Kaitlyn sez, "I just binged *Detroiters* (Comedy Central, CBS All Access) and I can't recommend it enough. I watched it when it was on TV and it's one of the funniest sitcoms that everybody slept on. Before that I binged *Corporate*, also on Comedy Central and also hilarious. I've been reading *The Idiot* by Dostoyevsky and if I ever finish it I can give you a proper recommendation. So far I like it, oddly enough it kind of feels like a sitcom. My favorite book is *Down and Out in Paris and London* by George Orwell, I highly recommend. As far as films go I watched 'Death to 2020' on Netflix and then rewatched it 2 more times. It was written by Charlie Brooker and if you appreciate great satire you'll enjoy this film. Charlie Brooker has said some jokes that make me truly furious that my brain will never be that good," and also, "Feel free to set me up with your single friend who has all the hand tattoos." w: thehardtimes.net/?s=kaitlyn+jeffers; @jeffernaut (tw); @_kaitlynjeffers (ig)



3 years finding himself, and he was now ready for a serious relationship. Olivia emphatically agreed, pointing to her ovaries and saying that she was afraid if she did not have a child in the next three years she would not have someone to take care of her at the end of her life. They both talked openly about how they feared death, and the various infidelities they had committed.

"I've cheated on every partner I've had," said Olivia, "and sometimes I steal things!" Mark told her that he also stole things, and was not about to stop any time soon. "Perhaps we can go to Macy's together sometime."

The pair left the coffee shop and walked down Sunset, where they stopped at a "For Rent" sign in front of the old Rutland house. Legend had it that Ty Segall covered 300 songs from that old house, and late at night you can still hear the echoes of deep cut Black Sabbath billowing through the halls.

"Should we do it?" Mark asked. Of course Olivia obliged. The pair immediately called the landlord and decided to consummate their relationship as they waited for him to approve their application.

"I haven't felt so free since I got out of jail!" Olivia said. "I, too, have been to jail!" Mark excitedly replied while looking for his dog.

The landlord returned with their keys and lease. Olivia and Mark were just finding out each other's last names.

Their relationship progressed as the day went on. Soon, Olivia was pregnant and they were trying to figure out how to get Mark's oversized Rothko painting through the front door. About a week later Mark proposed to Olivia, and her response was...

(now SCREAM some deeply personal fact about yourself)

I May Be Achilles' Heel, But That Doesn't Mean I'm Not Strong In My Own Way



Wilson Conkwright (he/him) is from a small town in Kentucky, much like George Clooney, Abraham Lincoln, and Muhammad Ali. He writes humor, voice acts and plays a disgusting amount of DnD. Wilson recommends, "TV: How To with John Wilson; Movie: Deerskin; Music: A Tabua De Esmeralda by Jorge Ben Jor; TTRPG: Dungeons and Dragons 5e; Phone game: Fishdom; Plants: Bonsai; Soda: Root Beer; Color: Mustard; Fabric: Velvet; Wood: Oak; Dogs: Mine."
w: wilsonconkwright.com; @wlsncnkwrgh (tw; ig)

I know the rumours floating around out there about me. People are calling me weak, aren't they? They say I'm pathetic. Soft like a baby's fontanel. Well, I'm writing now to let everyone know that even though I'm the sole vulnerability of history's most impenetrable man, that doesn't mean I'm not strong in my own way.

Despite what you've probably heard, I am a very normal heel, decent on all accounts. I may not be the best heel, but nobody is really "the best" anything. I mean, Achilles was supposed to be the best fighter to ever live and... Bad example. Michael Jordan! He set all the records and was the greatest. BUT! Then, LeBron comes along and is a more complete player, with better rebounding and shooting in the paint, making HIM the greatest! All I'm saying is, there will always be a better basketball player than... Listen, I'm not even a sports guy.

That's what macho culture does! It's like all these feet ever want to do is brag about how tough they are. But thanks to years of therapy, I've learned that toxic masculinity is the name of the poison that's corrupted everyone I know into mistaking their callused sole for toughness. Toxic masculinity is what I have been fighting against for 2,700 years, give or take, and only now am I finding the vocabulary to describe, discern, and distance myself from it.

It's not just me, my whole family isn't strong. Have you ever seen the horror movie *Hostel*? Well, in that movie, a character gets their Achilles' tendon snipped by a pair of scissors. That tendon was my cousin, Ralph. We heels are vulnerable – none of us have backbones. But for some reason, I'd still try and hang with the tough crowd: biceps, ball joints, shins (as if they wouldn't know I was just the empty space between

bone and calf wrapped in skin). I'd nod in agreement about an athlete I'd never heard of, or not cry when they'd spit in my beer. Now, after serious work on myself, I don't play that charade anymore. I don't even try to placate others when they threaten to take vengeance on me for the good of Greece.

So what if I don't fit in. I'm not the part of the foot that has to prove how "tough" he is, I'll leave that to the ankles. I'm the part of the foot that wears his heart on his sleeve. I mean, if I wore sleeves. If you shoot me, I bleed. Snip me, I bleed even more. (RIP Ralph.) I'm the type of heel that likes to crochet while listening to Mozart's harpsichord works, so what?? That's okay. That's who I am and I am not ashamed of it.

It takes daily reminders to not be ashamed of it, sometimes for hours repeating in the mirror, "You are a beautiful, talented, totally capable heel worthy of any foot." And it's true...

If any of this is resonating with you, I think it's time you do some introspection. You don't have to pretend to be somebody else to get along in life, even if you caused the death of Ancient Greece's greatest hero. Travel. Pick up watercolours. Ask out that cute earlobe from work. Live without regrets and eventually you're bound to find the self acceptance required to not care if you collapse after you're stuck with an arrow. Trust me.

If I leave any sort of legacy when my time comes, I want it to be this– "No matter how much the world hates you, slanders your name, or curses you by making your worst moment immortal, you can always learn to accept yourself." And, in some cases, you're gonna have to learn to love yourself, because no one else will.

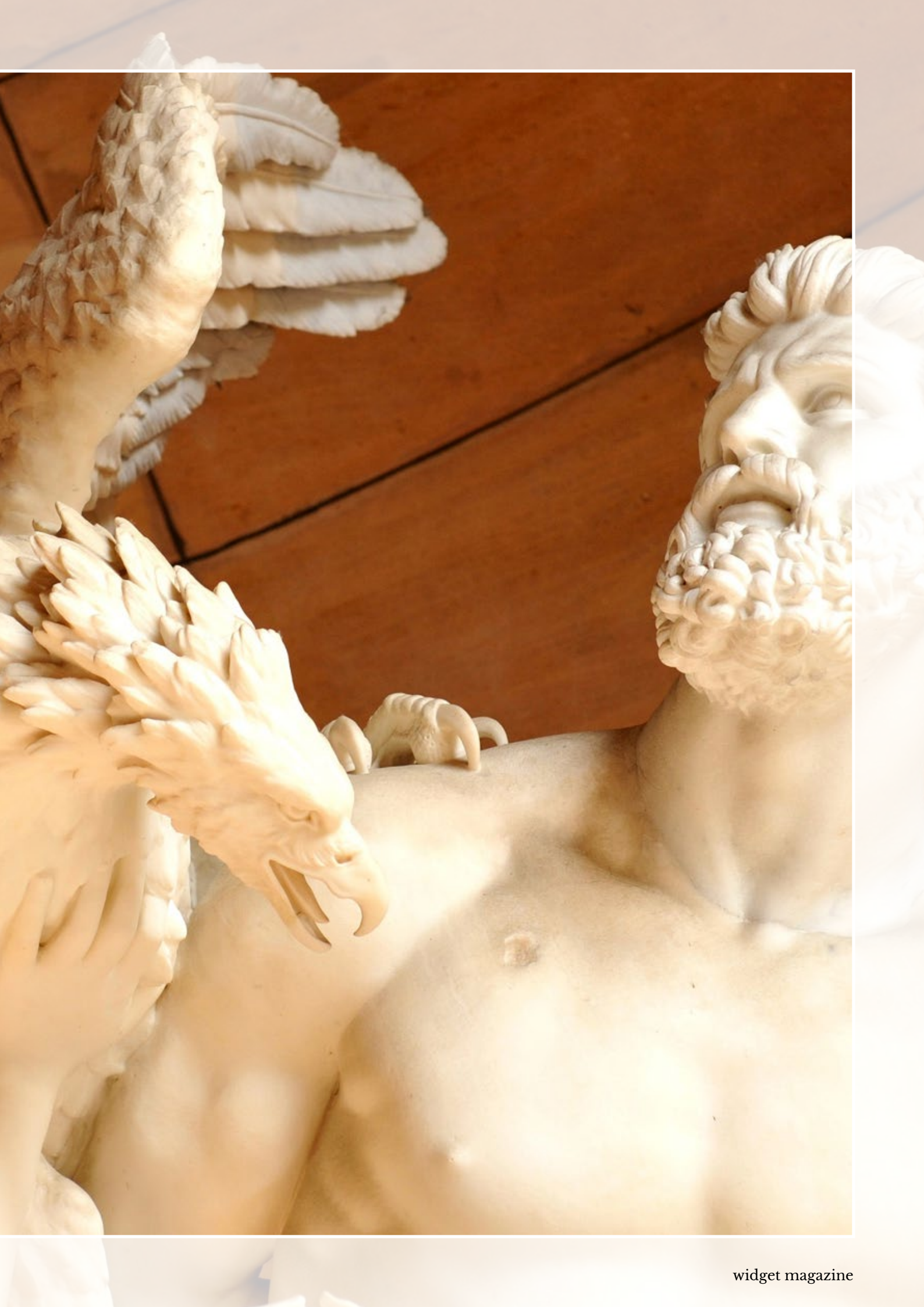
I'M SORRY I WAS A BAD EAGLE. PLEASE STOP MAKING ME EAT THAT DISGUSTING MAN'S LIVER.

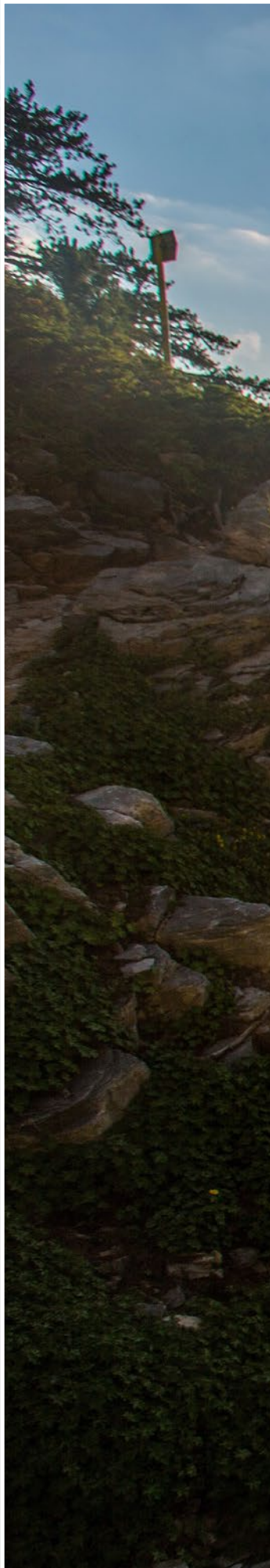
Amanda Lehr (she/her) is an organic lifeform based in Brooklyn, NY. Her work has appeared in McSweeney's Internet Tendency, Slackjaw, the Belladonna, the Niche, and several of the Zodiac letters. Amanda recommends, "Earthlings (Sayaka Murata); Peeping Tom (1960, dir. Michael Powell); "Polite Bear Waves Hello" on YouTube. I hope you like them, and I take zero responsibility for any emotional damage." @am_lehr (tw)

Hey, Zeus. Old buddy. Pal. I know that we've been on the outs ever since you declared, "BRING ME THE BEAUTEOUS GANYMEDE," and I rolled my eyes and groaned, "Oh, good – another 'cup twink' for Zeus; I was so worried we were gonna run out. . ." But it's been thirty millennia, so it's about time that I come right out and say it: you know how you chained Prometheus to a rock for eternity, and I have to eat his liver every day? That punishment was way too cruel.

To me.

First of all, that spot where you chained him in the Caucasus? Nowhere near my nest. I'm aware you mostly hang around Olympus, but surely even you know that mountain range is 750 miles long. That's one hell of a commute. And you gods may eat the same thing every





damn day — a little ambrosia, a little nectar — but the rest of us crave some variety. Wanna know what I had for breakfast this morning? Warm liver. The ten million, nine hundred fifty thousand days before that? Warm liver. Tomorrow? Oh look — more warm liver. Would it kill you to leave me some sides once in a while? Maybe dolmades. Or a nice chianti.

Have I mentioned how big a Titan liver is? It's huge. I'm very bloated, Zeus.

Would it help if I apologised? Fine. Besides the Ganymede thing (which you weren't supposed to hear), I'm sorry I ate that squirrel I found in your throne room — I had no idea that you'd transformed one of your nymph sidepieces to hide her from Hera. You should pick a bigger animal next time. And don't nymphs basically grow on trees?

Also, I'm sorry that I said that you "can't get girls unless you turn into a bird first." That was unfair. Sometimes you turn into a bull. Or marry your own sister.

But, as I was saying, it's not just the monotony that's bothering me. It's the guy that the liver's attached to. I can't sugarcoat this: Zeus, Prometheus reeks. He's been lying out there in the sun, unshowered, for countless ages of man, so I have to chew through a Seven-Layer Dip of Stank to get anywhere near his organs. It's disgusting. For the love of You, can't you at least send Hermes to hose him off once in a while?

Also, I can't blame Prometheus for this, but the daily torture and isolation from all of humankind is making him. . . a little off. After a few centuries of screaming, he went through this phase where he kept trying to bite me "so we'd be even." Now, he thinks he has jokes. I don't chat with my food if I can avoid it, but lately, as soon as I land, he's started doing this spasmodic little wink and saying, "Come here often?" Then he makes finger guns. It's mortifying. Even if I did occasionally drop your thunderbolts right behind you and snicker when you jumped, subjecting me to this level of social awkwardness seems cruel and unusual.

So, have I guessed my Bird Crime yet, or was it something else? I mean, I'm not the Oracle of Delphi here. Be honest: is this about that night that we both got really drunk, and you said, "yooooo — your mom's a hideous sea monster," and I said, "WELL, AT LEAST MY DAD LOVED ME ENOUGH THAT HE COULD TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ME AND A LITERAL ROCK," and then you didn't speak for like twenty minutes? I went too far. Kronos is off limits.

Remember all the good times we had? Like when you saw me soar by right before you fought the Titans and





thought, “Damn, whatta bird! Like, omen-quality. Must be my lucky day.” I served you well. And, if we’re being honest, I’m about as well-behaved an eagle as you are a god, and I don’t see anyone making you chow down on offal.

Wait, what? Really? I “won’t be doing this much longer”? I’m not sure why you said it all weird and darkly chuckled, but I’m glad you’re coming around, man. You’re sending Heracles on a “liberation mission” with a long-range bow? Good. Maybe we can go hunting after he frees me. But, whatever we catch, he can eat the liver.



I Have An Important News Story For You But It Is At The Bottom Of This Page And Your Eyes Look So Tired...

Aaron Weerasinghe (he/him) writes jokes and makes comics. You might see him using the moniker Gregor because [REDACTED]. Aaron recommends, “Mr. Boop (comic), Moonstruck (film), Urgent Care (podcast), Why Won’t You Date Me (podcast), and Mascot Engulfed Vine (video) have all brought me joy recently.” @AWGregor (tw)

Ah, my dear friend! I’m glad I caught you. I have a most pertinent news story that you must read. I believe its contents to be absolutely essential and of the utmost importance. Oh, but the news is at the bottom of this article and your eyes look so very tired. Perhaps another time, you have been scrolling for so long already...

True, this story is a gamechanger but –. Ah, fine, if you insist! Come then, let us proceed.

Oh, never you mind about subscriptions or signing in through Facebook. Consider this a gift, a free article for a friend. Why, it would be my pleasure. What’s this? My devilish smile? Why,

I am simply pleased to see you amidst the current madness. Oh, look how you rub your eyes and clench your jaw. The developments I speak of are particularly dire and involve a certain politician of interest but come. We will go back –

True, true. I suppose it is better to find out from a reliable source, is it not? Let’s continue onward then.

It’s much further down. But while we’re here, observe the advertisement banners that line the walls of this page. What? You can’t see them? Ah, how curious. I wonder how that can be when they’re there clear as day, coquettishly beckoning you to find out why dermatologists abhor this woman’s virtuoso spirit. Is there something blocking your

vision? Perhaps we should turn back. You do look oh so tired. And although this information concerns public health and legislation that will influence your life, we can just save it for another time. Please, it is no matter. Besides, I'm sure someone on Twitter will make a thread –

True. People on Twitter *can* say anything.

Proceed, my good reader. Therein lies the news you seek. Just beyond the paragraph break.

...

Ha! ha! ha!

Oh, don't mind me. Make yourself comfortable as I busy myself sealing you within this article for all eternity. It's far too late to tab out now, for I've fettered you to this page using these very words as your shackles.

Joke? I assure you this is no jest. For too long I suffered your myriad insults and injuries. I bore them bravely, but it goes against my nature to leave such wrongs unpunished. How greedily you lapped up the free articles I so generously offered you, time and time again. And how brazenly you plundered these

archives *incognito* as if I wouldn't recognize you in that fool's hat and glasses. Are you surprised I knew? Ha! Erasing your cookies did nothing to erase the foul stench of your thieving presence. Clear your cache you may, but the malice in my heart will not be erased so easily.

Yes, yes, I understand perfectly! And I am simply granting your wish. You sought to know what was behind my humble paywall, and it is behind this paywall you shall remain until the end of your days. What's that, you say? You simply wanted access to reliable reporting on crucial, urgent matters? A news source that doesn't tote conspiracy theories and brazen disinformation? Well, frankly, that's none of my concern. I've a business to keep and a hedge fund to please. But fret not, friend. You will be safe and undisturbed beyond this paywall with no more cloying need to stay informed about national happenings. *In pace requiescat!*



Lesser Known Knights of the Round Table Group Therapy



Erica Ruth Kelly (she/her) is a writer, storyteller, and speaker. Her work has appeared in BuzzFeed, The Toast, The Globe and Mail, and Maisonneuve. Originally from Montreal, she lived in Toronto for the past few years before recently moving to St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, where she now shares a home with a very nice little dog who bears a striking resemblance to Falcor. Erica sez, "Danny Lavery's podcast, 'Dear Prudence', changes my life for the better every time I listen to an episode. And 'Offbook – The Improvised Musical Podcast' is a testament to what we can do as a society when we make art through friendship as opposed to competition, that is, the results are perfect and hilarious."

Paul Bishop (he/him) works in youth mental health education at the YMCA. He's a big fan of comedy podcasts like Comedy Bang Bang and Threedom. Paul recommend, "The podcast 'You're Wrong About'."

This piece is a transcription of an audio improv sketch.

DIEDRE FRANCIS – COUNSELLOR'S NOTES: Today's group therapy session with the lesser-known Knights of the Round Table proved that they are slowly letting go of their Excalibur envy. No longer obsessed with whether or not they measure up to King Arthur, during today's session, they shared odd, seemingly anachronistic dreams about a time I don't quite understand.

ERICA: Welcome to "None of this is real." Today's feature is an excerpt from a group therapy session with the lesser-known Sirs of the Round Table.

ERICA (AS COUNSELLOR): Uh, you should be feeling free to let your feelings out. And that's why last, last week, uh, when, when you all were here, uh, I talked to you about doing that dream journal. So I'm wondering if, uh, any of you have brought it in this week. What did you cover in the dream journal? I was talking about having nightmares um about, uh, about geography class and how

PAUL (AS SIR LUKE): Of course, yeah, yeah...

COUNSELLOR: And all of a sudden ...

SIR LUKE: You were so terrible at geography...

COUNSELLOR: All of a sudden I'm back at school...

SIR LUKE: Sorry I shouldn't say that...

COUNSELLOR: I'm back at school and I'm having to do the test in my un-

derwear. And I can't remember a thing. So um...

SIR LUKE: Ah, classic. Yeah yeah.

COUNSELLOR: Um, did, did any of you have, uh, any good dreams or bad dreams you wanted to share with the group? So we can talk about, uh, maybe, maybe they mean something significant to you.

PAUL (AS SIR TRISTAN): So it's Tristan again. I had this dream where I was back home in Australia and like, I was just like, walking through the outback, and I'm walking along, you know, just like fucking chilling out, whatever. And then I come across this like, giant, um, this giant kind of, you know, those like things, you get at like car dealerships? Those inflatable tube men, do you know what I mean?

COUNSELLOR: Sure. Yeah.

SIR TRISTAN: I'm walking through the outback and I come across one of these guys.

COUNSELLOR: In the outback?

Paul (as Sir Tristan): Yeah. He's in the outback, but like, he's trying to like get me to like, invest in like his, like vaping vape store, pyramid scheme, or something like that.

COUNSELLOR: I just want to understand, wait, the things that they have, that the air goes through at the car dealership that wave around, that flap around in the air...

SIR TRISTAN: Yeah those things, the inflatable tube men...

COUNSELLOR: You saw one of those in the outback...

SIR TRISTAN: In the outback...

COUNSELLOR: And they were trying to get you to invest?

SIR TRISTAN: To invest in his vape business.

COUNSELLOR: I just wanted to be sure I understood. Go ahead.

SIR TRISTAN: Yeah it's a recurring dream that I have, and like, he's trying to like sell me on investing in his vape store. And I told him I don't have the money for that right now, but out of the corner of my eye comes Lancelot. Lancelot's like driving a hummer and he comes in. And he actually like knocks the inflatable tube man over and tells me to get in and I get in the car. But the car is actually, uh, instead of a seat, it's just like, it's like the interior of it is just like a giant, uh, like a gardening store filled with all these ferns and I get in and I get a giant rash from all the ferns.

COUNSELLOR: Oh no!

SIR TRISTAN: Yeah. I don't really understand what that's about, but that's what happened. I don't know if that's relevant.

COUNSELLOR: So, I think it's interesting. I'll be honest, for a second I forgot we were talking about dreams even though this was my exercise, so I didn't understand what you meant when you said the guy, the inflatable guy. So the inflatable guy seems to me like, that's probably, uh, maybe just how you're feeling about yourself. Maybe an empty person who has all this potential, but is not actually actualizing who they could be because they're just like roaming around in the air. And I mean, Lancelot, I mean by myself, you could say Lancelot is a lot!

PAUL (AS SIR SAGRAMORE): Yeah. Um, so this is Sagamore again and I don't usually dream. I usually just fall into a dark, dreamless sleep, uh, for hours and hours before I'm waking up in a cold sweat screaming. But I..

COUNSELLOR: Are you do...How often are you doing this?

SIR SAGRAMORE: Every night. Every night.

COUNSELLOR: Every night.

SIR SAGRAMORE: But, so that's, I don't usually dream. That's usually what happens, I fall into a dark, dreamless sleep and I wake up screaming. But I did

have this dream where I was imprisoned inside of a teacup. And I'd literally been there for 6,000 years and I was growing this long, long beard. And I was wondering when I would get out. And when there would be someone in there to keep me a bit of company and actually, um, Tristan showed up.

SIR TRISTAN: Really? I showed up. In your dream really?

SIR SAGRAMORE: Yeah. You showed up. And it was really lovely and we actually had a really nice chat. And then you started telling me about a dream you had had. And it was about walking through the outback, finding the guy, the inflatable tu...

SIR TRISTAN: The inflatable tube man, yeah! Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

COUNSELLOR: So you had...

Paul (as Sir Tristan): I was telling you about my dream in your dream.

COUNSELLOR: Dream within the dream. Oh wow! So...

SIR SAGRAMORE: Exactly, yeah. He was telling me about that dream. And it sounds like Luke had had the same dream as well. So yeah. Brilliant.

COUNSELLOR: How did you fit in the tea cup though, is what I don't understand.

SIR SAGRAMORE: I was very, very tiny.

COUNSELLOR: You were very ti...

SIR SAGRAMORE: Very, very tiny.

COUNSELLOR: A little tiny, a little tiny guy.

SIR SAGRAMORE: Minuscule. Absolutely minuscule.

COUNSELLOR: Do you think that's, uh, that relates to just how you feel in your own life? Very small?

SIR SAGRAMORE: Well, I am literally six and a half inches tall.

ERICA: That was today in "None of this is real." We hope you have an authentic tomorrow.

The clinic is very impressed that our new system of connecting with the knights is working. Armour is not impenetrable. Just thick.





Grim Reaper: In His Own Words

Widget did what had to be done to chat with the incarnation of death. (i.e., stood under window till piano fell on us.) We wanted to know if harvesting the souls of the living is all doom and gloom, or is there an upside? Enjoy!

“I also want to talk about Jimmy Eat World.

“How about Mark Trombino’s production?! I mean, look, I can’t be the only one listening to the ~10-minute electronic freak-out on Goodbye Sky Harbor and being all like, ‘Wait, the drummer from Drive Like Jehu produced *this*?!’ It’s just, wow!

“But it’s interesting if you listen to some of their demos to see how the songs can morph from half-baked to great: like ‘A Sunday’ – on the demo, the chorus *isn’t* the chorus; the bridge basically is! The structure of this song started all wrong! And you’re like, I can’t believe they didn’t see it right away.

“I guess it’s a testament to the importance of craft and iteration in art. Like, you hear the album version and it’s great, but it wasn’t always like that. Makes you think. You gotta stick with it.”

What Your Zodiac Sign Says About Your Likelihood to Meet Dan Aykroyd



Ramona Apthorp (she/her) is a Los Angeles based writer and artist. She has written for sites such as the hard times and has had her artwork mentioned in hyperallergic. She often makes work that is whimsical and down right weird. Ramona recommends, “Oh boy, here are some of my favourites. The original muppet movie, spirited away, screaming females, and Jonni phillips” w: ramona-makespuppets.com; @stink_punk_comix (ig)

ARIES – VERY UNLIKELY: The chances of you running into this Blues Brothers star are next to none.

TAURUS – FAIRLY LIKELY: There is a fairly good possibility that you’ll see him from afar at a restaurant. You will consider asking for an autograph but don’t want to come off as an annoying fan.

GEMINI – EXTREMELY UNLIKELY: Even if you are in the same room as Mr. Aykroyd and talk to him, he will never give you the opportunity to truly meet him. He will be closed off.

CANCER – VERY UNLIKELY: You might think you see him while in public but will realise it is just a very tall 8th grader.

The 8th grader will see that you look confused and will choose to bully you.



LEO – EXTREMELY LIKELY: It is very likely that you will run into Mr. Aykroyd in a public setting such as a café or bookstore. It will be a very positive experience and bring you comfort.

VIRGO – FAIRLY LIKELY: It is likely that you will have the opportunity to meet Mr. Aykroyd but you may choose not to engage with him because he will be in the middle of a heated fight with his distributor for Crystal Skull Vodka.

LIBRA – VERY LIKELY: You will be on your way to a potentially life-changing job interview and he will delay your travels. You will not get the job but that will not necessarily prove to be a bad thing. The job that you're going to miss out on would put you in close contact with angry bees for at least a year.

SCORPIO – EXTREMELY LIKELY: You will meet him but make a wrong turn in conversation when you start to bring up how much you love Harold Ramis in Ghostbusters. You'll notice that Mr. Aykroyd seems a bit jealous but won't

realise just *how* jealous until years later when he produces a Ghostbusters reboot featuring a disgusting slime-monster with your exact name.

SAGITTARIUS – FAIRLY UNLIKELY: You most likely won't meet the famous ghost enthusiast-turned-comedian but you will meet someone very dear to him who will tell you that they bet Dan would not like you. They will say that Dan is a first-impressions guy and that you don't really play towards that strength.

You will take these words to heart and dig deep to reconsider how you treat others and let others treat you.

CAPRICORN – IT WILL HAPPEN: You will host a dinner party. For this party, you will invite all of your work friends and allow them each to bring a plus one. You will regard this party as a turning point in your life and treat it as a symbol of finally being an adult.

The night of the party will arrive and one of your guests will bring their drinking buddy as their plus one. That drinking buddy will most definitely be SNL alum Dan Aykroyd. Mr. Aykroyd will ruin your party by talking, in excruciating detail, about the time he had a sexual encounter with a ghost during the filming of the original Ghostbusters.

He will lament that only the 'ghost blowjob' made the final edit of the film – Mr. Aykroyd will narrate how the original script had this sequence take up the entire third act but was ultimately cut because, as the studio head informed him, "we can't show a ghost railing your ass in a family film, Dan".

AQUARIUS – ABSOLUTELY NO CHANCE: You won't even be in the same state at the same time.

PISCES – YOU WILL BE THE LAST FACE HE EVER SEES: Your comedy career will take off and you will absolutely nail your SNL audition. You will end up booking the job and being added to the featured cast.

Around the same time, Dan Aykroyd will suffer a massive heart attack and be taken to the hospital to undergo open heart surgery. He will make it through the surgery and spend a couple days in the hospital to recover.

While in recovery, Mr. Aykroyd will put on SNL so he can reminisce about the good old days. A sketch where you play a divorced wolfman will close the show. Mr. Aykroyd will bust a gut so big that it triggers another heart attack.

Your wolfman sketch will be so funny that it kills Dan Aykroyd.

Sure I Flew Too Close To The Sun, But What About All The Great Flying I Did Up Until That?

Ashley Glick (she/her) is a writer and comedian from Illinois. She has contributed work to ClickHole, Reductress, and Google, among others. She's been performing improv comedy since she was 16 years old, and has studied and performed at multiple theaters including the Second City Chicago and the Magnet Theater in New York. Ashley recommends, "Follow erma. fiend on instagram. Other than that I've been reading a lot of pulp fiction by Jim Thompson lately and enjoying it." @Exce1lentFancy (tw); @petiteilanit (ig)

BY ICARUS, SON OF DAEDALUS. "Don't fly too close to the sun," they say. They don't even know the half of it.

My story is used as a warning. It is in one breath associated with the folly of man and the dangers of hubris. And I'm not trying to diminish the fact that I royally fucked up. But why won't anyone talk about how good my flying was up until the wings melted and I fell into the sea? Because up until I made that teensy mistake, I was rippin it through the sky like a bat out of Hades.

A little backstory: My father, Daedalus, was a master craftsman – only Hephaestus himself could create wonders more marvelous than he. For this reason, the great king Minos claimed my father as his own personal builder and locked him away in the labyrinth that my father himself had built. Okay fine, but how come *I* got locked up, too? I didn't sign up for *ANY* of that. I was just a dumb teenager. Can you imagine how pissed I was?!

So we constructed wings made from the feathers of seagulls and candle wax and planned to fly out of our confinement. Pops had two rules regarding our escape plan – "Do not fly too low, for if you do your wings will be dampened by the sea and the weight will pull you beneath the waves. But ALSO – and this is key – do not fly too high, for if you do the heat from the sun will melt the wax holding your wings together and you'll plummet into the aforementioned sea.

In hindsight, we probably shouldn't have used wax.





Once I was dead, can you imagine my frustration, my absolute horror when I learned that my story had become a cautionary tale for emboldened youth, instead of what it should have been, at least partially – a thorough account of my sick barrel rolls, 200mph inverted flight and graceful loops? Folks almost *never* mention my flawless tailspins, hammerheads and positively godlike (yeah, I said it!) downward drift. I feel like people wouldn't harp so much on the sun thing if they had seen me doing all that cool stuff. I was churning out tricks flawlessly – even the birds were dizzy!

As I ascended into the heavens and looked down upon the graceless and ignoble Cretans, I was struck with an idea of epic brilliance. I took a leak while I was up there and it flowed forth, from my pee hole, over the entire population. Even the old man had to chuckle at the sprinkle of piss raining down upon those Cretan delta dorks. But do people speak of this hilarious moment? Nope.

One last thing. I could draw in the sky by soaring through the clouds so fast they trailed behind my pointed toes. I drew a penis, obviously. It's what the Ancient Greeks do. My body was a paintbrush and my canvas was the sky. But no one remembers my art. They only remember the fall.

In retrospect, it really wasn't even that close to the sun! The gods are jerks. I'm not saying I didn't fuck up, you KNOW I'm not saying that. I'm just saying I only fucked up the one time. Give me a break. The gods fuck up **CONSTANTLY**.



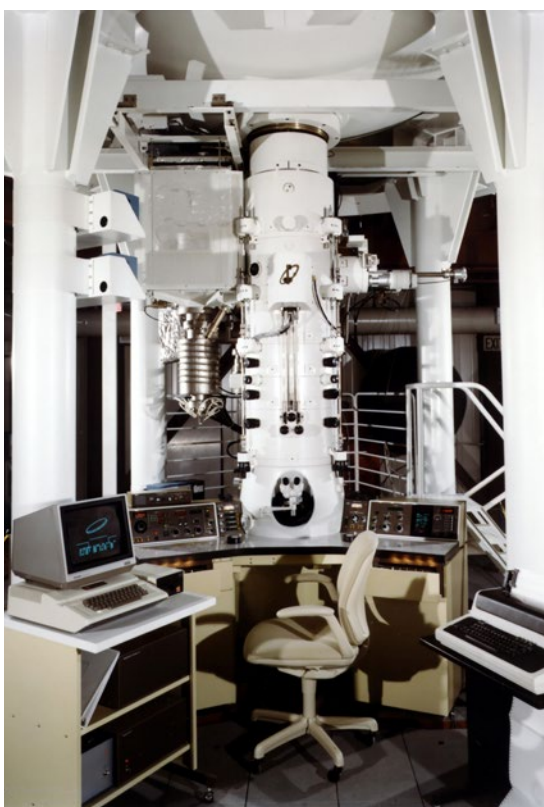
Now I'm dead, and my name will live on forever – but not for the loop de loops, or the low stealth flying, or the big dick in the sky, but for the one teensy-weensy little mess-up. I guess Greek mythology is a lot like Nascar: you come for the pageantry, but you stay for the crashes.

My only regret? That I never pantsed my dad as we soared above the sea.



bye bye.







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